LANGUAGE TEACHING CHALLENGES: A MULTILEVEL APPROACH

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"Language Teaching Challenges: A Multilevel Approach" is a collection of studies exploring foreign language teaching challenges through multiple research perspectives. It includes six studies, each addressing various issues of challenges experienced by language teachers.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

"Language Teaching Challenges: A Multilevel Approach" is a collection of studies exploring foreign language teaching challenges through multiple research approaches. It includes six studies, each addressing various issues of challenges experienced by language teachers.

The first study provided an overview of the challenges English as a foreign language teachers face. In doing so, it specified the difficulties encountered by language teachers and also asked what influence challenges exert on their instructional practices.

The second study looked into the challenges of language teachers in Ukraine and considered their possible causes. To this end, an exploratory study was carried out with the participation of 44 foreign language teachers. The qualitative data collected through an open interview were subjected to content analysis. A range of potentially challenging aspects of language teaching and their causes were derived from the data analyzed.

The third study analyzed comparatively the challenges encountered by language teachers with varying lengths of teaching experience. Quantitative data were collected utilizing a questionnaire involving 208 language teachers. Thus obtained data were processed through the MANOVA technique of SPSS.

The fourth study purported to analyze EFL teachers' current and retrospective perceptions of challenges associated with language teaching tasks. Quantitative data were collected utilizing a questionnaire and processed through Friedman's ANOVA and a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, which were used to test whether the rate of perceived challenge associated with EFL teaching decreased as teachers gained experience.

The fifth study explored the academic discourses on language teaching challenges by leveraging corpus methods. The gleanings were obtained from a specialized corpus of journal articles pertinent to the designated topic aggregated from the flagship journals in the field. By deploying keyword and collocation analyses, enhanced by the analysis of concordance lines, the study evinced the prevalent themes and concepts related to language teaching challenges.

The final study focused on the challenges encountered by EFL student teachers during their school practicum experience in Ukraine, by combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods.

CHAPTER 1
OVERVIEW OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING CHALLENGES

Providing preparation and development opportunities sensitized to teachers' needs and challenges is essential for quality language education and the recruitment of competent professionals. Nevertheless, pertinent literature systematically observing English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching challenges is still sparse. To address this omission, the present study provides an overview of the challenges EFL teachers face throughout their careers. In doing so, several questions are asked: What influence do perceived challenges exert on language teachers and on their instructional practices? What challenges do EFL teachers encounter, especially in view of the increased demands for learners' language proficiency? Such insight into the hardships experienced by language teachers could pave the ground for serving them with more evidence-based rather than formalist support.

A substantial amount of research has addressed the challenges teachers encounter in the general education field. Concomitant research on EFL teaching challenges is far less copious. One of the conspicuous research lines unravels the context-specific EFL teaching challenges. Because language teaching is socially- and contextually-situated, an overriding concern of researchers has become the localized perspective on language teaching challenges (Copland et al., 2014; Madalińska-Michalak, J. & Bünyamin, B. (2018; Valizadeh, 2021). The EFL field is also preoccupied with the investigation of challenges and the support of newly-qualified teachers (Komar et al., 2021). Quite a few studies address the issues of escalating expectations of language teacher proficiency (Freeman, 2017; Sadeghi & Richards, 2021). Amid all this diversity of research foci, it is essential to navigate through the findings of EFL teaching challenges and synthesize their implications for language education, which predetermines the relevance of this study. Accordingly, the study aims to review the literature pertinent to the challenges faced by EFL teachers. The object of the study is foreign language teaching challenges. The subject of the study is the challenges language teachers encounter as described in the relevant literature. To conduct this overview, the Research4Life platform was used, which is a collection of flagship publications that hosts many databases, including the EFL teaching and learning field. The platform was browsed for papers focusing on challenges language teachers encounter.

Conceptualization of challenges faced by EFL teachers

The current movements shaping the field of language teaching and learning are embedded in the sociocultural perspective (Johnson, 2009) and critical pedagogy, which foreground research traditions in teacher cognition and language teacher education for social justice (Kubanyiova, 2020). Through a sociocultural lens, challenges are associated with a cognitive-affective domain, intersecting between emotions, beliefs, and attitudes, and are induced by hardships or obstacles. Cognitions relate to what "teachers think, know and believe, and how they relate to what teachers do" (Borg, 2011, p. 128). In turn, challenges generate an emotional response in teachers and learners. Emotions play a vital role in language teaching and learning, determining the choice of instructional and learning preferences (Lodge et al., 2018; Richards, 2022). Emotions as an affective category have been examined recently in terms of their influence on language teachers' social interactions. Eventhough emotions are central to our understanding of cognitions, language teacher education literature often slights them. Nguyen (2018) pertinently argues that in order to understand teachers as whole persons, it is essential to link their knowledge, beliefs, and thoughts with their feelings or emotions (p. 244). Teaching is described in the academic literature as an emotionally charged activity (Richards, 2022), invoking in teachers and learners various affective reactions due to their involvement in social interactions.

There is little agreement on the nature of challenges in language teaching or how the inferences drawn from research should shape teacher preparation. In general sense, challenges are associated with emotions that enhance any activity, including teaching. According to "APA Dictionary of Psychology" a challenge is "an obstacle appraised as an opportunity rather than a threat. A threat becomes a challenge when the individual judges that his or her coping resources are adequate not only to overcome the stress associated with the obstacle but also to improve the situation in a measurable way" (American Psychological Association). The like proactive emotional reactions instigate teachers as lifelong learners for professional development. Golombek and Doran (2014) explain that teachers' "…emotional context, reflecting individual teacher's perezhivanie is a motivated, structural component of teachers' processes of cognitive development" (perezhivanie –feeling, emotion) (p. 102). The authors indicate that dissonance between the teacher's real self and the one they aspire to serves as a driving force for growth. Kubanyiova (2012) likewise observes how an "emotional dissonance" caused by the dif-

ference between teachers' aspirational identity and their actual performance spurs teacher development. In a systematic literature review, Hökka et al. (2020) conclude that emotions either support or hinder learning at work. There was also a contrary direction of influence when learning at work influenced emotions. Thus, if teachers are confronted with new tasks subjectively judged by them as surmountable, they treat such tasks as an opportunity for growth. At the same time, the borderline between challenges treated as doable tasks and difficulties for which teachers lack adequate resources is vague. Subjective perceptions of the task difficulty have ramifications for language teachers' decision-making and performance. When teachers perceive tasks as doable, associated challenges have a facilitating effect. Conversely, encountering tasks perceived as threats to teachers' competence may have debilitating effect leading to anxiety, stress, and teacher attrition.

Influence of challenges on language teaching

Although there is a dearth of studies evincing the influence of challenges on language teaching and learning, they resonate with implications of teacher cognition and affect observations. Language teachers' perception of challenges can affect their performance and instructional preferences in varied ways. For instance, such perceptions can influence:

- teachers' use of the target language (TL) (Chambless, 2012);
- their job resilience, and result in teacher attrition (Vesely et al., 2014; Wilkerson, 2008);
- their well-being (Sulis et al., 2021);
- teachers' professional identity (Teng, 2017);
- the choice of instructional procedures (Saunders, 2013);
- their commitment to learners and school as a whole (Shepherd et al., 2011);
- patterns of interaction with learners (Yuan and Lee, 2015);
- curriculum decisions, instructional focus (form- or meaning-oriented) (Chacon, 2005);
- their preferred communication style (Kyriacou, 2000);
- teachers' motivation and job satisfaction (Davis et al., 2006);
- the level of stress teachers experience (Vesely et al., 2014);
- teachers' goals, priorities, and pace of professional growth (Golombek and Doran, 2014).

Thus, if teachers feel anxious and insecure about new teaching approaches or techniques, they tend to avoid using them and stick to traditional practices (Saunders, 2013). Shepherd et al. (2011) describe how negative experiences associated with failure resulted in drops in affective commitment at the workplace. Challenges associated with classroom management and disruptive student behavior may cause feelings of anxiety and stress in teachers. In this respect, novices are especially vulnerable. Kyriacou (2000) points out that student misbehavior causes stress in inexperienced and experienced language teachers alike. In reaction they adopt a more authoritarian style. Teachers in his study felt discomfort and concern over the disciplining measures and the authoritarian style they adopted. Anxiety caused by challenging situations, like fear of making mistakes or not being able to answer students' questions, led a language teacher to become more controlling in the study of Yuan and Lee (2014). Language teachers' perceptions of challenges have ramifications for their job resilience, teacher attrition, and job satisfaction. An EFL teacher in the study of Levrints/ Lőrincz (2022) commented: "The main problem I experienced was student discipline. I had no previous experience in teaching. Dealing with learners was hard, especially with adolescents. I felt students were testing me and my limits. I had trouble establishing my authority in the classroom. I often cried after lessons in the beginning. I was seriously considering quitting teaching. It took very long to learn how to establish a relationship with learners".

One of the principal causes diverting potential candidates from opting for language teaching as a career were challenges associated with insufficient command of the TL in the study by Back and Dean (2020). Research likewise indicates that challenges caused by inadequate knowledge of the target language influence teachers' communicative behavior in the lessons and the amount of time teachers spend speaking it (Chambless, 2012). Teachers' lack of confidence in their proficiency leads them to concentrate more on form-focused instruction rather than meaning-focused. Chacon (2005) details that teachers concerned about their level of English proficiency emphasized grammar instruction rather than genuine communication in English lessons.

Due to contextual and personal challenges pre-service language teachers face, they may lose their initially high motivation to teach and ultimately abandon teaching as a profession. Challenges encountered by pre-service language teachers can potentially threaten their well-being. In particular, Sulis et al. (2021) show how challenges incurred by a transition to distant learning impacted student teachers' well-being. Also, the perceptions of challenges were mediated by language teachers' agency (Sulis et al., 2021).

Challenges EFL teachers face

Perceptions of EFL teaching challenges can be externally or internally motivated, i.e., deriving from the contextual or personal domains. Similarly, challenges are either specific to a discipline or inherent to the teaching profession, irrespective of the content area. The group of external and discipline-specific factors is related to the role of English in the globalized world, where it is a staple for a country's full participation in the world socio-economic and education arena. Hlas (2018) formulates a Grand Challenge for foreign language education as follows: "Improve the functional proficiency of all students at a level that allows them to interact for personal and professional pursuits" (p. 49). The special status of English implies "that English teachers worldwide play a seminal role in the development of English competence among its learners, and for teachers to be able to deliver competent speakers, their own professional competence is also a priority (Sadeghi & Richards, 2021, p. 1).

The escalation of expectations of EFL learners' communicative competence and teachers' professionalism has raised numerous issues. One of the ensuing debates concerns the expectations of EFL teachers' knowledge base, dispositions, roles, and teachers' capability to live up to them. Many of the challenges EFL teachers experience are captured in the standards, e.g., of language learning or teacher preparation. Normative standards can serve as a checklist against which teachers probe themselves. A detailed look at a range of respective standards shows that they prioritize communicative competence (Levrints/Lőrincz, 2019). Earlier language teaching approaches, informed by the theories of structuralism in linguistics and behaviorism in psychology, did not require language teachers to possess a native-like language proficiency. However, with a shift from form-focused to utility approaches favoring authentic communication in language learning, language teachers' proficiency has been emphasized. As Young et al. (2014) comment: "For students at the elementary and school levels, access to teachers who have the necessary professional knowledge and functional English language skills to teach English effectively is critical" (p. 1). Thus, one of the externally generated EFL teaching challenges is language proficiency. As Richards (2022) explains: "Using English to teach English can also create an emotional struggle for the teachers." and lack of competence in English can result in feelings of insecurity and frustration (p. 228). Teachers' self-appraised EFL proficiency was shown as a continuous source of stress and doubts over

their competence (Behroozi, 2014; Farrell & Richards, 2007). Also, against the "native-speakerism" bias, EFL non-native speaker teachers feel disadvantaged and challenged (Houghton et al., 2018; Richards, 2022).

Paralleled with the re-emphasis in the EFL learning objectives of meaningful communication, changes have taken place in the specifications of pedagogical content knowledge in language education. During the "fit-for-all, ideal method" quest, teachers were trained to apply a single method, which did not pose a substantial challenge. Since then, the field has undergone a redefinition in the methodological eclecticism paradigm (Tarnopolsky, 2018). Eclecticism in language education involves informed decision-making by language teachers of appropriate didactic interventions and the ability to navigate through a plethora of approaches. Hence, the expectations of teachers' competence have risen dramatically. Language teachers reported being challenged by having to introduce approaches based on communicative language teaching, for instance, task-based language teaching (Littlewood, 2007). Despite the transition to methodological eclecticism and focus on communicative language teaching, traditional methods that favor instruction of isolated grammar and vocabulary persist in many national contexts (Akbari, 2015; Valizadeh, 2018).

Resonant with the critical role of language proficiency, language teachers reported teaching speaking a considerable challenge. In a large-scale study involving 4459 teachers worldwide, Copland et al. (2014) found that teaching speaking was the most frequently identified challenge. As stated by the language teachers themselves, they struggled to get children to speak and create an English-only classroom.

One of the most common EFL teaching challenges is associated with students, including discipline issues, classroom management, motivation, differentiation, and others. Difficulties with an undisciplined class were described as an intimidating experience, requiring the exertion of both novices and expert teachers (Corso & Contreras, 2011; Macías & Sánchez, 2015). The difficulties identified by Riesky (2013) were students' rudeness, uncooperativeness, noisiness, low motivation, and language competence, to name a few. Discipline was the second-largest group of language teaching challenges in the study of Copland et al. (2014). Komar et al. (2021) made similar observations in that newly-qualified language teachers experienced serious challenges by maintaining rapport with learners, disciplining them, instructional management, and others.

One of the main concerns of language teachers surfacing in the literature is learner motivation. A low level of motivation was one of the main challenges in the studies of Akbari (2015), Akcan (2016), Levrints (2022) and Madalińska-Michalak and Bünyamin (2018). Many language learners fail to realize the significance of English or enjoy learning it for various reasons and "try to get a passing mark to get rid of the course" (Akbari, 2015, p. 396). In some national contexts, low learner motivation is a washback effect of high-stakes examinations, where teachers have to fit their teaching to their demands. As a consequence of extensive preparation for written form-focused examinations, students' motivation to acquire English as a means of communication wanes (Littlewood, 2007).

Many EFL teachers struggle to meet the curriculum requirements. Thus, in the study of Valizadeh (2021), Turkish EFL teachers complained about the pressure of curriculum requirements. In the teachers' words, they were explicitly discouraged from using extra materials apart from course books prescribed by authorities, which stifled innovative and creative language teaching. Another issue concerned the de-emphasis of oral communicative competence in the curriculum. In addition, although many national curricula advocate communicative language teaching, the mandatory language examinations emphasize isolated knowledge of grammar and vocabulary (Copland et al., 2014).

A few studies indicate that language teachers are also concerned over differentiation of instruction (Madalinska et al., 2018). In an interview study by Levrints/Lőrincz (2022), Ukrainian EFL teachers self-reported that they grappled with the need to differentiate instruction and teach mixed-ability classes. Many learners in Ukraine, as in other countries, have varied access to learning opportunities (Copland et al., 2014). Better-off parents have their children attend private lessons, which makes for the variance in learners' language proficiency. As a result, teachers need to deal with students with disparate levels of competence.

In many countries language teaching and learning issues stem from inadequate language policy. For instance, Iranians are discouraged from watching satellite TV to avoid its "corruptive" influence. It limits EFL learners' access to authentic language input, resulting in poor communicative competence and low language learning motivation (Akbari, 2015). Similar issues pertain to Ukraine. Although the current language policy stipulates the acquisition of English, the detrimental influence of the language policy

induced by Soviet ideology still endures. Disregarding the fact that foreign languages were taught in all schools around the country, the ultimate goal of language education was not language acquisition but knowledge about language. It served to exclude the Ukrainian citizens from participating in intercultural communication and coming into closer contact with the English-speaking world (Levrints/Lőrincz, 2022).

Surprisingly, only an insignificant number of studies have identified EFL teaching challenges deriving from the nature of the discipline itself. Except for teaching speaking and grammar, other aspects of language competence do not regularly feature among the challenges voiced by language teachers themselves. Thus, teachers reported to experience difficulties in explaining grammar in clear terms (Levrints/Lőrincz, 2022), striving for linguistic accuracy in learners, correcting accuracy errors, and implementing communicative techniques to teach grammar (Al-Mekhlafi et al., 2011). Many teachers expressed concern about the low motivation for learning grammar, looking upon it "as a necessary evil at best, and an unavoidable burden at worst" (Al-Mekhlafi et al., 2011, p. 69).

A number of studies outline the contextual challenges. In many national milieus, language teachers face significant challenges incurred by the low social status of the language teaching profession, poor remuneration, lack of incentives, lack of respect on the part of students and society, lack of support from colleagues and school administration, inadequate professional guidance and induction, and some others (Back & Dean, 2020; Komar et al., 2021; Madalinska et al., 2018; Sadeghi & Richards, 2021; Sulis et al., 2021).

Conclusions

Challenges are a cognitive-affective category related to teachers' subjective perception of obstacles associated with language teaching and learning. If teachers possess sufficient resources to tackle challenges, they treat them as an opportunity to improve. Challenges affect language teachers in multiple ways. Most commonly, challenges are associated with a facilitative effect instigating teachers' professional growth. However, if the perception of a challenge is slanted more toward difficulties, it can adversely affect language teachers, leading to stress, burnout, and teacher attrition. Challenges affect teacher performance in various ways. They manifest in language teachers' choice of instructional procedures, patterns of interaction with learners, communication style, usage of the target language, professional identity, curriculum decisions, well-being, job satisfaction, and resilience.

For abstraction, EFL teaching challenges can be grouped into externally and internally motivated to the teacher. External challenges arise from the status of English, language policy and governmental initiatives, curriculum constraints, expectations held of teachers' competence and language teacher roles, student- and instruction-related issues (discipline, learner motivation, mixed-ability classes, instructional management), low social status of the teaching profession, lack of financial incentives and resources, and others. The internal challenges EFL teachers face comprise the personal qualities of teachers and an inadequate level of professional competence. Because language teaching is emotionally challenging, more vulnerable are language teachers with a low level of willingness to communicate, anxiety as a trait characteristic, a low level of emotional intelligence, and stress resilience.

Challenges can further be subdivided into discipline-specific or discipline-independent, i.e., stemming from the nature of the discipline or inherent to all teaching professionals. Language teachers face the challenges of developing communicative competence in learners, especially given the role of English as a means of economic prosperity. Along with the spread of content-based language instruction, different models of bilingual education, and immersion programs, language teachers have to steer between language competence development and teaching the content from other disciplines. It is a daunting perspective for many language teachers, who may lack the necessary competence in the respective fields.

Since this study has only addressed a few of the language teaching intricacies, further research is necessary to unravel the challenges associated with EFL teaching. A subsequent investigation could include a systematic review appraising previous studies of language teacher challenges in light of their relevance for language teaching. It would also be interesting to know if there is any relationship between perceived challenges and teacher misbehavior or whether challenges influence teacher effectiveness.

SUMMARY

Furnishing language teachers with preparation and professional development opportunities catering to their needs and challenges is central to quality language education. However, there are many omissions in the literature that need addressing in this respect. This study aims to provide an overview of the challenges English as a foreign language teachers face. Accordingly, it asks two questions: What influence do perceived challenges exert on language teachers and their instructional practices? What challenges do language teachers encounter, especially given the increased demands for learners' language proficiency?

Challenges affect language teachers in multiple ways. This influence is traceable to their choice of instructional procedures, patterns of interaction with learners, communication style, usage of the target language, professional identity, curriculum decisions, well-being, job satisfaction, resilience, etc. The challenges language teachers encounter were described in this study as externally and internally motivated to the teacher, and as discipline-specific or discipline-independent, inherent to teaching in general. External challenges include expectations of teacher competence and language teacher roles, student- and instruction-related issues (discipline, learner motivation, mixed-ability classes, and instructional management), low social status of the teaching profession, lack of financial incentives and resources, language policy, etc. The internal challenges language teachers face are caused by the personal qualities of teachers and an inadequate level of professional competence. Overall, the issues taken up in the study could highlight the venues for leveraging language and teacher education.

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CHAPTER 2
UNDERSTANDING CHALLENGES
OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS:
A UKRAINIAN PERSPECTIVE

Since the proclamation of its sovereignty in 1991, Ukraine has committed itself to the inculcation of core democratic values and exemplar world practices in its education system. In response to these obligations, several governmental initiatives were issued, including "Conceptual principles of state policy on the English language development in the sphere of higher education. Project of the Ministry of Education and Science" (МОН України, 2019). As stipulated by the document, education is recognized as a stimulus of societal transformation, and knowledge of English as a foreign language as a key competence, instrument of intercultural communication, and a precondition of its integration with world education.

Spurred by the like initiatives, foreign language (FL) teachers have assumed a central role in the communicative competence development of their students, which has increased demands on the quality of their work and, consequently, on the quality of language teacher education and development. However, ensuring high-quality standards cannot be limited to one-way, imposed from the above initiatives. The implementation of educational reforms hinges to a greater extent on the teachers themselves, hence the importance of paying heed to the language teachers' voices.

The analysis of academic literature on FL teaching in Ukraine has revealed a group of difficulties plaguing FL teaching and, in particular, language teachers. One of their pertinent causes is the country's language and education policies. Although the Ukrainian educational system is committed to reforms, many of the entrenched from the Soviet period stereotypes hinder the renewal of its FL teaching practices. As Professor Vyshnevskyi (2016) pointed out, some decades before the Soviet language policy stipulated that all children learn FLs, eventually without acquiring them as a means of communication. Its implicit goal was to prevent society from coming in contact with the capitalist world, in this way avoiding its "corruptive" influence. The language teaching objectives, approaches, and methods were selected accordingly. Under the circumstances, communicative competence development was considered an unrealistic and implausible goal.

Partly, it was also due to the lack of resources. Throughout the country, learners were taught not the language per se but about the language. The procedures prevailing in the classrooms included reading complicated texts and explicit learning of grammar and vocabulary. As the outcome of such courses, students could not communicate in the target language and quickly forgot it. As the corollary, FL teachers were not expected to attain a high level of language competence. All this was reflected in the teacher preparation system, leading to drops in the quality standards and preparation of second-rate language specialists.

Even though the Ukrainian education system is currently undertaking serious attempts at its reform, the influence of the former language education policy is hard to overcome. The language teaching methods focusing more on form than meaning persist. The academic year 2018−2019 saw the introduction of the "New Ukrainian School" reform necessitating the reappraisal of the objectives, traditional approaches in FL education. In particular, learners are now expected to acquire skills enabling their active participation in the contemporary multinational and multicultural society, thus foregrounding the significance of intercultural communicative competence. Thus, the Ukrainian FL teachers are confronted with the challenges requiring both shifts in their cognitions and the need for adequate preparation to meet such expectations. The situation is further aggravated by the widespread tendency of teachers to teach the way they were taught, and not the way they were told to teach (Oleson & Hora, 2014).

Another source of challenges related to the previous policy issue stems from the lack of the standard of FL teacher preparation in Ukraine and, ensuing from it, multiple sore points in the formal teacher education. Although the project of the standard was developed in 2016, it has not been approved or implemented yet. Universities are left to their own devices, for the better or worse, for providing quality language teacher preparation. Standards of FL teacher professional development are also yet to be developed. Although the Ukrainian academia unanimously recognizes the significance of teacher induction, little is done in the way of guidance and support to novice teachers. Thus, according to the "Conception of development of pedagogical education", there is a need for implementing teacher internship for newly qualified pedagogues to counteract high rates of teacher attrition in the country (МОН України, 2018). The problem of teacher attrition in Ukraine stands acute, as supported by the findings

of Shchudlo et al. (2018). As shown in their study, the bulk of Ukrainian teachers is in their thirties, while the percentage of novices constitutes a mere 6% of the total population of graduates. It is all the more surprising, given the fact that around sixty higher-education institutions prepare FL teachers in this country.

Detailed analysis of the curricula of FL teacher education programs in Ukraine revealed that they accentuate the development of professional competencies and, especially, practical skills relevant for effective language teaching. However, the number of credits allotted to the discipline "Methods of FL teaching" (a classical curriculum component in Ukraine) varies significantly. It ranges from as few credits as 3 (e.g., Uzhgorod National University) to as many as 22 (e.g., Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk national pedagogical university) at the undergraduate level. School practicum also varies from 4,5 to 16 credits in the universities (Леврінц, 2020). Given such variability, many university programs lag behind the quality standards in furnishing their graduates with the necessary practical skills of organizing effective instruction. By way of example, the Ukrainian EFL teachers deplored the overly theoretical slant of their university programs and insufficient opportunities to engage in the practical application of the curriculum content. Another critical issue transpiring from this research was the subsidiary role of language teaching methodology and the prevalence of linguistics courses in the universities. The participating teachers expressed a wish to learn the language teaching methodology, pedagogy and psychology in more detail and less so the disciplines covering knowledge about language (e.g., history of English, general linguistics, theoretical grammar) (Levrints, 2022).

Another source of difficulties nagging Ukrainian language teachers is presumably the level of FL proficiency on the analogy with their colleagues from other countries. The previous research has borne out that language teachers' perceptions of their linguistic competence cause fear and anxiety, affecting their motivation, instructional preferences, and the choice of classroom techniques and procedures (Faez & Karas, 2019; Farrell & Richards, 2007). Language teachers experienced pressure imposed by curricula demands (Valizadeh, 2021), which may be incongruent with the local realities of education, for instance, differences between rural and urban areas, where the level of learner motivation and parental expectations can stand in stark contrast. Potential sources of challenges, identified in the

study of Trynus (2017), were the low socio-economic status of teachers and lack of resources. Novice teachers also experienced difficulties caused by the insufficient level of professional competence, among which were maintaining rapport with learners, making language mistakes, keeping discipline, planning and managing instruction, failure to provide a clear explanation of the new material, excessive paperwork, and others (Komar et al., 2021). However, research focusing on the challenges experienced by Ukrainian FL teachers irrespective of their teaching experience could not be located in the academic literature.

This study aims to disclose the challenges encountered by language teachers in Ukraine and consider their possible causes.

Accordingly, the following research question needs to be addressed:

• What are the perceived challenges faced by the Ukrainian FL teachers?

Next, the discussion proceeds with the description of the methodology and results of this study.

Materials and methods

Participants

Altogether forty-four FL teachers expressed their voluntary consent to participate in the study. They currently occupy positions in Ukrainian educational establishments. The study's sample was recruited using a convenience sampling technique (Griffee, 2012). The teaching experience of the participants varied between 2 and 41 years. The sample was represented by 11 primary school teachers, 24 secondary school teachers, and 9 university lecturers with BA, MA, and Ph.D. degrees. The teachers were free to quit the study at any moment.

Data collection and analysis

In order to explore the challenging areas in FL teaching in Ukraine, an open interview was selected as an appropriate format for generating qualitative data. Although interviewing does not allow for the breadth of the study, it is particularly effective when the problem requires an in-depth analysis. The interviewees were requested to answer an open-ended question, "Which areas of FL teaching do you find challenging?" In addition, follow-up questions served to ensure the clarity and the necessary level of detail of responses. The respondents were also asked to indicate their age, education, position, length of teaching experience, and the educational level of their students. The interviews were conducted either in person or online via software applications in 2021.

The data were transcribed and analyzed with the help of a content analysis method. First, the themes repeatedly mentioned by the teachers were singled out. Next, they were assigned codes and worked through quantitatively (the number of references made by the respondents) and qualitatively (the reasons and explanations suggested by the respondents). Finally, two teachers were re-interviewed so as to ensure the credibility of the study. They had to read the summary of their interview prepared by the author of this study and decide whether the interpretation of their responses was valid (Griffee, 2012).

Research results and discussion

The results of content analysis, based on which a group of themes and their numeric characteristics were extracted, are presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. FL teachers' challenges

№	Themes	Frequencies	Percentage
1	Differentiation and individualization of instruction	28	64
2	Lack of teaching resources	21	48
3	Planning for instruction	20	45,5
4	Rapport with learners and maintaining discipline	17	39
5	Mixed ability learners	16	36
6	Motivating learners	13	29,5
7	Meeting curriculum requirements	8	18
8	Explaining grammar	8	18
9	Stress and anxiety	7	16
10	Teaching speaking	5	11
11	Teaching writing	5	11

As evidenced by the data set in Table 2.1, the interviewees grappled with the need to attend to students' individual differences (64%) in that most of them commented on the issues of providing personalized instruction tailored to students' needs and teaching classes with mixed ability learners (36%). Many experienced teachers reported struggling with a lack of teaching resources (48%), including listening materials, up-to-date course books, and other financial concerns. Establishing workable relationships and rapport with learners, disciplining them (39%) was problematic as well. The participants treated these two challenges as a single interdependent issue. The teachers also stated that learner motivation (29,5%) persisted

as one of the most challenging tasks. Several respondents commented on curriculum requirements (18%) which were believed inadequate. The following comments illustrate the participants' standpoint:

When I started working, I wanted to teach everything according to the curriculum and the book. I imagined ideal classes and ideal circumstances. Later I realized that I need to take into account my learners' needs, interests, abilities because all classes and all learners are different. I needed to learn to be flexible in preparing my lesson plans (T3).

Other interviewees reported having to combat stress and anxiety (16%), especially in the early years of teaching. The teachers felt challenged and stressed by questions from learners, translation of vocabulary items, committing errors, disruptive student behavior, and overwork caused by lack of experience in planning for instruction. The excerpts given below exemplify teachers' views:

Several years before, I often felt unpleasant tension before lessons. I tried to rehearse what I had to explain to learners before classes (T11).

The main problem I experienced was student discipline. I had no previous experience of teaching. Dealing with learners was hard, especially with adolescents. I felt students were testing me and my limits. I had trouble establishing my authority in the classroom. I often cried after lessons at the beginning. I was seriously considering quitting teaching. It took very long to learn how to establish relationships with learners (T17).

Students provoked me, organized power tests, and examined my knowledge of English. It was very stressful (T38).

A distinct group of factors causing difficulties, as reflected by the participants' responses, concerned different aspects of EFL teaching, such as providing clear explanation and practice of grammatical structures (18%), developing oral communicative competence (11%), and teaching writing (11%). Other domains of EFL teaching like vocabulary, pronunciation, listening, and reading were alluded to by less than 10% of respondents. The quotations given below exemplify teachers' beliefs:

I wish I could explain grammar in simple terms to different learners and make it less frightening to my students (T41).

Other challenges identified by the teachers were lack of professional guidance at the induction phase, organizing distance learning, teaching culturally diverse learners, insufficient knowledge of FLT methods.

In reflecting on the challenges they face in language teaching, the interviewees mentioned a plethora of blocks related primarily to their professional competence and, in particular, to general pedagogical knowledge and skills. However, the teachers were less inclined or eschewed talking about

challenges related to their language proficiency or pedagogical content knowledge. Thus, most problems stemmed from pedagogical and learner knowledge areas, including personalized instruction, lesson planning, learner rapport, discipline, etc. The participants in this study made more frequent reference to areas inherent to the language teaching, like different aspects of managing the instructional process or developing language skills, for the most part, similar to their colleagues from other countries. The interviewees infrequently commented on the areas external to their immediate professional obligations and pinpointed rather forcefully only one such theme, i.e., lack of resources. Parallels can be drawn with an extensive study of Copland et al. (2014), whose respondents were also challenged by discipline problems, classroom management, motivation, and differentiation. The only substantial difference between the findings of this and the above-mentioned study was in the rate of challenges caused by teaching speaking, which was the most challenging aspect in the previous research. The participants of this investigation were also pressurized by the curriculum requirements and lack of facilities, as in the study of Valizadeh (2021) conducted in the context of Turkey. Some analogies can also be found between the results of this and the study of novice FL teachers conducted by a group of Ukrainian researchers, which suggested that they experienced difficulties with the management of the instructional process, lesson planning, communication with learners, student behavior, and others (Komar et al., 2021).

An issue voiced by the respondents concerned anxiety associated with teaching, resonating with the study of Harmsen et al. (2018), whereby stress was shown to positively correlate with teacher attrition. These problems were perceived by the participants as more urgent than immediate aspects of language teaching. At the same time, teachers shied away from mentioning the challenges associated with their language proficiency, although the "native-speakerism" bias (Houghton et al., 2018), viewing non-native language teachers as deficient users of the target language, is also making its demands on the FL teachers in this country.

Conclusions

Challenges faced by Ukrainian FL teachers persist as an under-researched area, providing limited empirical insight for teacher education and development. To expose the difficulties of Ukrainian language teachers, an exploratory study utilizing an open interview was carried out. Next, the generated

data were submitted to a content analysis method. When asked about the challenging aspects of language teaching, the participants identified a number of potential sources.

The most striking finding to emerge from this study was teachers' identifying problems mostly internal to their professional obligations, i.e. stemming from the features of their professional competence, as well as learners. They were less inclined to search for sources of problems among the external factors. The interviewees frequently referred to the challenges of personalizing instruction, planning, and management of instruction, establishing rapport with learners, attending to discipline issues, motivating learners, and teaching mixed-ability classes. The teachers also reflected on the challenges of developing various language competencies, like explaining grammar in clear terms, teaching speaking, etc. However, they were less frequent than the problems concerning general pedagogic knowledge. A serious issue to transpire from the study was the level of stress and anxiety experienced by language teachers, especially at the outset of their careers. Finally, the participants frequently commented on the problems caused by the lack of resources, especially due to the need for implementing distance learning.

The limitations of the given study derive from the caveats of a qualitative research paradigm in general. Since we deal with an in-depth analysis of a limited number of cases, it requires a precaution in drawing generalizations to larger populations. Nevertheless, qualitative research is particularly suitable when exploration of as complex an issue as challenges experienced by FL teachers is desired.

Overall, an exploration of challenges encountered by EFL teachers can potentially illuminate the areas of professional knowledge requiring additional attention in teacher education. Anchored in the EFL teachers' perceptions, the implications of this study refer to the need for enhanced preparation in the areas of pedagogical and learner knowledge, stress resilience, and specific aspects of language competencies development. A further strand this research could take is a quantitative follow-up probing of the themes emerging from this exploratory study. It would assist in the triangulation of the obtained data.

SUMMARY

Challenges encountered by foreign language teachers remain an understudied issue in the context of Ukraine, awaiting a more systematic empirical response. The given study aimed to probe for the challenges of Ukrainian language teachers and consider their possible causes. To this end, an exploratory study was carried out with the participation of 44 foreign language teachers. The qualitative data collected through an open interview were subjected to content analysis. A range of potentially challenging aspects of language teaching and their causes were derived from the data analyzed.

The findings indicated that the respondents were inclined to identify the challenges of language teaching with the aspects inherent to the profession. In other words, they commonly referred to difficulties deriving from the characteristics of their competence and the nature of their professional activity. The interviewees repeatedly referred to the challenges of personalizing instruction, its planning and management, establishing rapport with learners, attending to discipline issues, motivating learners, and teaching mixed-ability classes. The teachers also reflected on the challenges of developing various language competencies, like explaining grammar in clear terms and teaching speaking. Meanwhile, the respondents rarely mentioned causes of difficulties external to them, for instance, language policy. However, they frequently commented on the problems caused by the lack of resources, in particular, indispensable in distance learning. Thus, the teachers' overriding concern stemmed from having to deal with learners, which outweighed the significance of developing their language skills.

Overall, the qualitative snapshots of the foreign language teaching challenges help discern areas deserving more specific attention in teacher education. One of the study's implications is the need to embrace the views of practitioners in organizing effective teacher education. Otherwise, risks are high of furnishing them with preparation experiences divorced from their actual needs.

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CHAPTER 3
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EFL TEACHERS' CHALLENGES WITH VARYING LENGTHS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE*

While teachers have been recognised to contribute substantially to student learning (Blazar & Kraft, 2017), relatively little attention has been paid to the challenges teachers experience throughout their careers. This neglect of the impact of teaching experience on EFL teacher perceptions of challenges is unjustified. Language teachers' professional mindset and expertise undergo transformations throughout their careers, which deserve heed in providing relevant teacher development opportunities. To study language teaching challenges and the influence teaching experience may have on teacher perceptions, it is necessary to trace the recent tendencies shaping language teaching and learning expectations, as they have ramifications for standards of effective practices.

The conception of language teaching challenges is intertwined with the language learning objectives and the expectations of teacher competencies, the latter having seen a dramatic increase due to several reasons. The first group of evolving alterations occurs against the backdrop of lingual globalisation, the status of English as lingua franca, and World Englishes (Bilikova & Seresová, K., 2021; Canagarajah, 2006; King, 2018). All these movements call for the need to prepare learners for global citizenship, where the major staple is EFL proficiency. Such preoccupation with language fluency has had consequences on language learning and teaching approaches. If a language serves the purposes of intercultural communication, then language lessons cannot be reduced to decontextualised manipulation of language forms. Huhn (2012) is insistent that "today's teachers must be more than transmitters of knowledge who orchestrate repetitive practice of decontextualised language forms with students: They need to infuse language instruction with meaning and purpose, design opportuni-
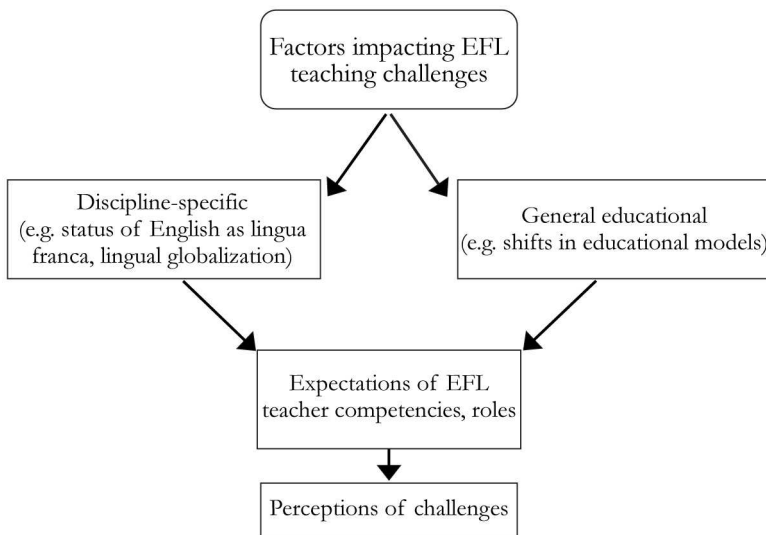
ties for interaction within and beyond the classroom, and provide responsive and useful assistance throughout the learning process" (p. 163). Placing teachers on the slippery ground of methodological eclecticism (Kumaradivelu, 2012) calls for an informed selection of relevant language teaching approaches. Indeed, present-day teachers require knowledge of and sensitivity to a vast spectre of didactic repertoire and theoretical background to scaffold language learning. At the time of dominant methodology or search for an ideal method, language teachers were expected to be well-versed in a single method and taught to a recipe. Thus, language teachers in the 21st century might feel challenged by having to achieve near native-like proficiency (Afshar et al., 2014; Houghton, 2018) and designing a learning environment congruent with well-grounded eclecticism. (Tarnopolsky, 2018).

Another powerful movement, transfiguring the role and expectations of teachers, should be searched in the general educational domain. Reorientation of the traditional instructional model based on transmission towards transactional, or otherwise termed, collaborative/transformative models (Levrints/Lőrincz, 2020) have refocused the roles of teachers and learners, observations concerning knowledge construction and interiorisation, and many other priorities in education. Many of them have been made within the social constructivism and critical pedagogy theoretical frames (Levrints/Lőrincz, 2019). In light of these changes, teachers should be ready to assume new responsibilities of facilitating, scaffolding learning, providing personalised instruction, promoting lifelong learning, learner autonomy, and sustaining learner motivation. An array of new responsibilities pose unprecedented challenges for language teachers, exacerbated by the local exigencies and accountability measures. Thus, teacher perceptions of challenges are impacted by intertwined discipline-specific and general educational groups of factors, as presented in Figure 3.1.

Language teaching experience is another research lens of interest to the present study. It is one of the variables affecting teacher effectiveness. Substantial empirical evidence has showcased a positive correlation between years of teaching experience and students' academic gains (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Podolsky, Kini & Darling-Hammond, 2019). In an extensive review of empirical studies documenting the effect of teaching experience, Kini and Podolsky (2016) summarised that it was significantly associated with student achievement. Further on, it was also positively associated with school

attendance by learners, aspects of the discipline, amount of time students spent learning. Finally, experienced teachers had a beneficial effect on their colleagues and schools. Teachers were also found to have higher levels of self-efficacy as they gained experience (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2007). In addition, teaching experience was evinced to influence the planning and implementation of instruction. While experienced language teachers exercised more independence, flexibility, responsiveness to situational demands, and critical stance, their less experienced counterparts preferred relying on laid-down guidelines and rules and abstained from breaking routines (Tsui, 2009). Another observation concerned the number and quality of thoughts reflecting language teachers' pedagogical knowledge, quantitatively and qualitatively different between novice and experienced teachers (Akbari & Tajik, 2012). Novice and experienced language teachers also differ in the organisation of their professional knowledge. Experienced teachers possess a more sophisticated, integrated, and organised store of knowledge than novices, which enables recognition and interpretation of patterns of classroom occurrences (Tsui, 2009; Wolff, 2021).

Figure 3.1. External factors impacting perceptions of EFL teaching challenges

Despite the fact that the impact of teaching experience has been well-documented in the academic literature, there are hardly any studies

picturing its role from the perspective of challenges language teachers experience at different stages of their professional lives. Moreover, compared to the relatively well-documented challenges of novice language teachers (Komar et al., 2021), problems of their experienced counterparts have attracted limited research attention. Therefore, the present study aims to analyse EFL teachers' challenges, especially relative to the length of their teaching experience. Accordingly, it is essential to address the following research questions: What is the perceived rate of EFL teaching challenges? Is there any difference in language teachers' perceptions of challenges relevant to the length of their teaching experience? The study is structured as follows: first, the methodology and results of the questionnaire study are exposed. Next, the analysis and discussion of the findings follow, culminating with their practical implications and directions for subsequent research.

The study

Participants

The sample constitutes 208 EFL teachers recruited after their voluntary consent to participate in this study. The participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. The research site was Ukraine. A random sampling technique was applied to select the sample, which added to the representativeness of the population (Griffee, 2012). It included language teachers with BA, MA, Ph.D., and DSc degrees. They worked at educational institutions of different levels (primary, secondary, and tertiary). Their length of experience ranged from one to more than twenty-five years. The teachers were grouped according to their teaching experience duration as follows: 1−5 years, 5−10 years, 10−15 years, 15−20 years, 20−25 years, and more than 25 years. In the given study, the term "novice" refers to teachers with fewer than five years of teaching experience. Accordingly, teachers who worked for more than five years were labeled "experienced" in this study.

Data collection and analysis

This study reports findings of a broader study examining challenges confronting EFL teachers. It adopts a quantitative research paradigm and a survey design. To this end, a questionnaire was developed to generate quantitative data. Its items primarily incorporated the gleanings obtained from an interview study that explored the challenges of Ukrainian lan-

guage teachers from a qualitative stance (Lőrincz, 2022). Thus, the parallel use of quantitative and qualitative methods added to the study's trustworthiness. The research instrument's validity and reliability were additionally strengthened by means of its piloting with five language teachers. Its reliability computed through SPSS yielded Cronbach's Alpha =.96 coefficient, which is very high. The questionnaire was delivered via Google Forms application. The study took place in 2021.

The questionnaire comprised two parts. The principal part of the questionnaire asked the respondents to indicate which areas of language teaching they found challenging and to what extent. The questionnaire targeted the challenges specific to foreign language teaching, such as teaching the four language skills (speaking, writing, reading, and listening) and the linguistic aspects (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation). Difficulties of more general nature associated with pedagogic competence were also addressed, including challenges of attending to learner motivation, planning, and managing instruction, understanding students, their needs, interests, strong and weak points, maintaining discipline, engaging all learners with the instructional material, individualisation and differentiation of instruction, providing effective teaching for all learners. To elicit responses, Likert-scale items were used, including a five-point scale where 1 stood for not challenging, 2 – somewhat challenging, 3 – challenging, 4 – very challenging, 5 – most challenging. The second part of the instrument requested the participants to provide information on their gender, educational level, the type of institution in which they hold teaching positions, and the length of their teaching experience.

The obtained data were analysed with the application of SPSS and the MANOVA technique. It enabled the computation of the ratings on the questionnaire items and to compare teachers' responses relative to the length of their teaching experience.

Results

Research question 1: What is the perceived rate of EFL teaching challenges?

In order to answer research question 1, the participants were requested to estimate the challenge associated with language teaching on a 5-point scale, where 5 corresponded to the highest and 1 − to the lowest degree of complexity.

Table 3.1. Ratings of the language teaching challenges

Which aspects of language teaching do you find challenging? Rate them from the most challenging (5) to the least challenging (1):	Mean	Std. Dev.
1. Developing learners' speaking skills	3.27	1.283
2. Motivating learners	2.89	1.354
3. Teaching writing	2.87	1.259
4. Teaching listening	2.78	1.163
5. Engaging all learners with the instructional material	2.64	1.211
6. Differentiation and individualisation of instruction	2.60	1.240
7. Providing effective instruction for all learners	2.58	1.294
8. Understanding students, their needs, interests, strong and week points	2.48	1.348
9. Teaching pronunciation	2.48	1.266
10. Assessing students' knowledge	2.44	1.202
11. Explaining grammar in clear terms	2.43	1.178
12. Maintaining discipline	2.38	1.284
13. Planning and managing instruction	2.38	1.174
14. Teaching reading	2.38	1.173
15. Teaching vocabulary	2.15	1.178

Table 3.1 illustrates the results of measures of the central tendency of the challenges associated with language teaching. The teachers indicated that the most challenging aspects of EFL were developing learners' communicative competence (M=3.27), motivating learners (M= 2.89), teaching writing (M= 2.87), and teaching listening (M= 2.78). They were rather challenged by having to engage all learners with the instructional material (M= 2.64), differentiating instruction (M= 2.60), providing effective instruction for all learners (M= 2.58), knowing their students (M= 2.48), and teaching pronunciation (M= 2.48). Student assessment (M= 2.44) and clear teaching of grammar (M= 2.43) attracted similar responses. The lowest rates were obtained for vocabulary teaching (M= 2.15), teaching reading (M= 2.38), planning and managing instruction (M= 2.38) and discipline issues (M= 2.38).

Although the participants felt challenged by all enumerated language teaching tasks, none was considered overly demanding, with the highest rate for teaching speaking (M= 3.27) and the lowest for vocabulary development (M= 2.15). In other words, only one item on the list was located on the scale between very challenging and challenging, while the rest of the items clustered on the continuum between challenging and somewhat challenging.

Research question 2. Is there any difference in language teachers' perceptions of challenges relevant to the length of their teaching experience?
To compare the perceived EFL teaching challenges between groups of teachers with varying lengths of experience, the MANOVA technique was utilised. The result of the one-way MANOVA set in Table 3.2 revealed a statistically significant difference in the perceived challenges associated with language teaching between groups of teachers with varying lengths of experience (F= 2.73, p <.0005; Wilk's Λ = 0.376, partial η2 =.18).

Table 3.2. Between-group comparison relative to the length of teaching experience: results of Multivariate Tests

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Wilks' Lambda	.376	2.735	75.000	904.710	.000	.178

Table 3.3 presents the measures of central tendency computed to summarise the data for the teaching experience variable. Measures of dispersion highlight the variability of rates for the teaching experience variable. Since the standard deviation indicators were rather small, the estimates of perceived challenges within groups of respondents did not vary significantly. Looking at the mean scores, it is evident that the novice teachers (1-5 years) demonstrated higher challenge rates than their most experienced colleagues on the instruments' prevailing number of items. Thus, there was a declining tendency in the challenge estimates on comparisons between the least and most experienced EFL teachers. By way of example, novices rated communicative competence development at M= 3.40, while teachers with more than 25 years of experience at M= 2.53. Similarly, planning and managing instruction was M= 2.53 for novice teachers and M= 1.89 for the most experienced group of teachers. Maintaining discipline was M= 2.73 for novices and M= 2 for experienced teachers.

A surprising finding to emerge from these calculations was that teachers with a length of experience of 10-15 years and, to a lesser extent, 5-10 years reported the highest rate of challenge (for example, Figures 2, 3). In the predominant number of instances, they estimated challenges higher than novices. For instance, the group of teachers with 10-15 years of experience scored M= 3.7 on teaching speaking, while novices scored

M=3.4 on the same item. Teaching grammar was calculated and distributed respectively at M= 3.1 and M= 2.27; teaching vocabulary - M= 2.6 and M= 1.67; teaching pronunciation - M= 3 and M= 2.33; teaching reading - M= 2.5 and M= 2.13; teaching writing - M= 3.6 and M= 2.6; knowledge assessment - M= 3.3 and M= 2.6; engaging all learners - M= 3.1 and M= 2.6; motivating learners - M= 3.3 and M= 2.67; knowing students - M= 3 and M= 2.2. The only exception was discipline maintenance, where novices rated the challenge at M= 2.73 and the group of teachers with 10-15 years at M= 2.2. This indicates that novices were more challenged by discipline issues than their more experienced colleagues.

**Table 3.3. Challenge estimates relative to the length
of teaching experience: descriptive statistics**

Which areas of language teaching do you find challenging? (the most challenging (5) - the least challenging (1)):	Teaching experience:	Mean	Std. Dev.
Developing learners' speaking skills	1-5 years;	3.40	1.221
	5-10 years;	3.30	1.133
	10-15 years;	3.70	1.361
	15 -20 years;	3.68	1.157
	20-25 years;	3.07	1.363
	>25 years.	2.53	1.246
	Total	3.27	1.283
Explaining grammar in clear terms	1-5 years;	2.27	1.015
	5-10 years;	2.83	1.141
	10-15 years;	3.1	1.165
	15 -20 years;	2.14	1.153
	20-25 years;	2.4	1.329
	>25 years.	2.11	1.034
	Total	2.43	1.178
Teaching vocabulary	1-5 years;	1.67	.711
	5-10 years;	2.17	1.102
	10-15 years;	2.6	1.465
	15 -20 years;	2.32	1.073
	20-25 years;	2.47	1.479
	> 25 years.	1.84	1.103
	Total	2.15	1.178
Teaching pronunciation	1-5 years;	2.33	1.373
	5-10 years;	2.78	1.191
	10-15 years;	3	1.522
	15 -20 years;	2.36	1.123
	20-25 years;	2.53	1.224
	> 25 years.	2.05	1.207
	Total	2.48	1.266

Table 3.3 (continued)

Which areas of language teaching do you find challenging? (the most challenging (5) - the least challenging (1)):	Teaching experience:	Mean	Std. Dev.
Teaching reading	1-5 years;	2.13	1.224
	5-10 years;	2.43	1.223
	10-15 years;	2.5	1.071
	15 -20 years;	2.32	1.073
	20-25 years;	2.37	1.213
	> 25 years.	2.05	1.114
	Total	2.38	1.173
Teaching writing	1-5 years;	2.6	1.429
	5-10 years;	2.96	1.316
	10-15 years;	3.6	1.046
	15 -20 years;	2.95	1.16
	20-25 years;	2.93	1.311
	> 25 years.	2.42	1.056
	Total	2.87	1.259
Teaching listening	1-5 years;	3.13	1.224
	5-10 years;	2.91	1.189
	10-15 years;	2.8	1.005
	15 -20 years;	2.73	1.107
	20-25 years;	2.73	1.363
	> 25 years.	2.42	1.004
	Total	2.78	1.163
Planning and managing instruction	1-5 years;	2.53	1.106
	5-10 years;	2.39	1.022
	10-15 years;	2.8	1.281
	15 -20 years;	2.45	1.210
	20-25 years;	2.47	1.332
	> 25 years.	1.89	1.085
	Total	2.38	1.174
Assessing students' knowledge	1-5 years;	2.33	1.373
	5-10 years;	2.57	1.025
	10-15 years;	3.3	1.218
	15 -20 years;	2.41	1.245
	20-25 years;	2.27	1.143
	> 25 years.	2.11	1.085
	Total	2.44	1.202
Engaging all learners with the instructional material	1-5 years;	2.6	1.38
	5-10 years;	2.74	.905
	10-15 years;	3.1	.852
	15 -20 years;	2.64	1.382
	20-25 years;	2.67	1.322
	> 25 years.	2.32	1.233
	Total	2.64	1.211

Table 3.3 (continued)

Which areas of language teaching do you find challenging? (the most challenging (5) - the least challenging (1)):	Teaching experience:	Mean	Std. Dev.
Motivating learners	1-5 years;	2.67	1.516
	5-10 years;	2.91	1.297
	10-15 years;	3.3	.923
	15 -20 years;	3.32	1.343
	20-25 years;	2.93	1.552
	> 25 years.	2.32	1.141
	Total	2.89	1.354
Understanding students, their needs, interests, strong and week points	1-5 years;	2.20	1.540
	5-10 years;	2.48	1.329
	10-15 years;	3	1.026
	15 -20 years;	2.68	1.506
	20-25 years;	2.53	1.279
	> 25 years.	2.16	1.151
	Total	2.48	1.348
Providing effective instruction for all learners	1-5 years;	2.53	1.525
	5-10 years;	2.7	1.245
	10-15 years;	2.7	1.129
	15 -20 years;	2.68	1.343
	20-25 years;	2.47	1.279
	> 25 years.	2.37	1.239
	Total	2.58	1.294
Maintaining discipline	1-5 years;	2.73	1.596
	5-10 years;	2.65	1.215
	10-15 years;	2.2	1.005
	15 -20 years;	2.23	1.327
	20-25 years;	2.4	1.380
	> 25 years.	2.05	1.012
	Total	2.38	1.284
Differentiation and individualisation of instruction	1-5 years;	2.73	1.461
	5-10 years;	2.7	1.093
	10-15 years;	2,7	1.031
	15 -20 years;	2.64	1.348
	20-25 years;	2.67	1.269
	> 25 years.	2.21	1.166
	Total	2.6	1.240

Overall, these findings indicate that teachers' perceptions undergo substantial transformations throughout their professional lives. These outcomes suggest that teachers come to realise the potential challenges and hidden risks of language teaching not immediately at the outset of their

careers in light of the fact that beginning teachers estimated EFL teaching challenges lower than the group with 10-15 years of teaching experience. Yet, the summative results of novices were substantially higher than those of teachers with more than 25 years of experience.
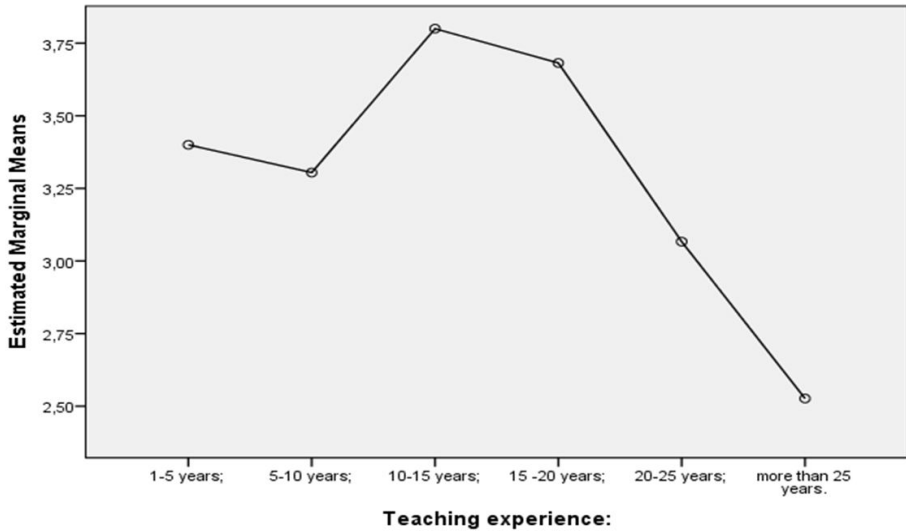

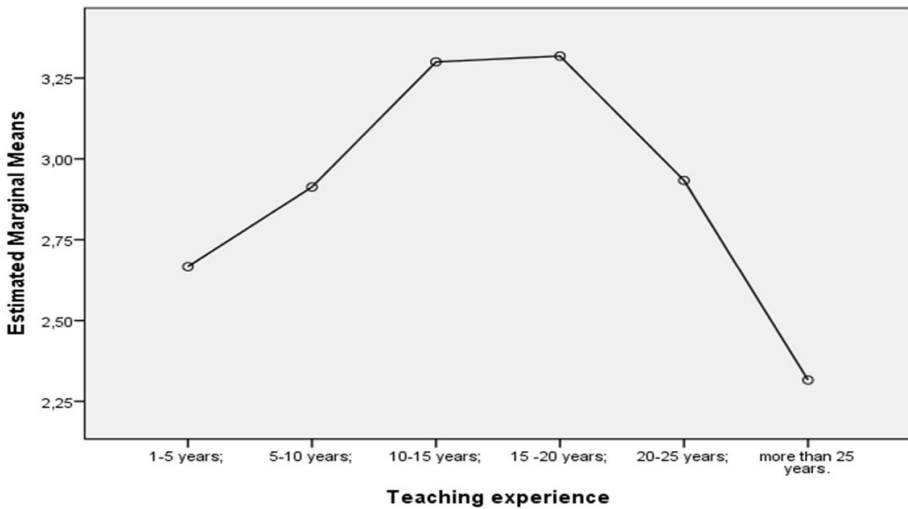**Figure 3.2. Teaching speaking**

Figure 3.3. Motivating learners

Table 3.4. Between-group comparison of challenges relative to the length of teaching experience: results of tests of between-subjects effects

	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Developing learners' speaking skills	4.755	.000	.105
Explaining grammar in clear terms	3.824	.002	.086
Teaching vocabulary	2.853	.015	.066
Teaching pronunciation	2.301	.046	.054
Teaching reading	2.100	.067	.049
Teaching writing	2.801	.018	.065
Teaching listening	1.443	.21	.034
Planning and managing instruction	2.031	.076	.048
Assessing students' knowledge	3.057	.011	.07
Engaging all learners with the instructional material	1.198	.312	.029
Motivating learners	2.913	.015	.067
Understanding students, their needs, interests, strong and week points	1.514	.187	.036
Providing effective instruction for all learners	.413	.839	.01
Maintaining discipline	1.588	.165	.038
Differentiation and individualization of instruction	.923	.467	.022

The results of tests of between-subjects effects specify the language teaching tasks that account for the variance in the responses of teachers with varying lengths of teaching experience. As observed from the findings set in Table 3.4, perceptions of teachers with various length of teaching experience differed significantly on such items as teaching speaking (p= .000, F= 4.75, $\eta2$ = .105), teaching grammar (p= .002, F= 3.824, $\eta2$ = .09), teaching vocabulary (p= .015, F= 2.85, $\eta2$ = .07), knowledge assessment (p= .011, F= 3.06, $\eta2$ = .07), and learner motivation (p= .015, F= 2.9, $\eta2$ = .07), with p set at 0.015 level. Thus, the length of teaching experience was significantly related to the perceived challenge rates, and its effect was large.

A detailed look at the obtained results revealed that the most substantial differences between teachers' responses concerned the linguistic aspects of EFL teaching, including teaching speaking, grammar, vocabulary, knowledge assessment, and motivation. Smaller variance was observed for more generic teaching tasks, such as effective teaching, differentiating instruction, disciplining learners, and student engagement. Altogether, summative findings indicate that the highest challenge rate was self-reported by the groups of teachers with a length of teaching experience of 10-15 and 5-10 years. They were followed by the novices, while the lowest challenge rate was observed for the most experienced teachers (more than 25 years).

Discussion

This study investigated EFL teachers' perceptions of teaching challenges in relation to the length of their teaching experience. The study was designed with two-fold objectives in mind. First, it was a quantitative follow-up to the previous interview study, which observed the challenges associated with language teaching in the context of Ukraine (Levrints/Lőrincz, 2022). Moreover, it compared language teachers' perceptions of challenges relative to the length of their teaching experience. The data, collected with the help of a questionnaire, was worked through the MANOVA technique of SPSS.

Overall, the participants were mainly challenged by teaching speaking, learner motivation, teaching writing, and listening. They were also moderately challenged by learner engagement, differentiating instruction, providing effective teaching, knowing their learners, and teaching grammar. These findings are largely congruent with the results of a large-scale study by Copland et al. (2014), in which teaching speaking and motivation also featured as the most challenging. They are also partly in line with the challenges highlighted by Madalinska-Michalak et al. (2018), who reported student motivation and differentiation as principal challenges. Looking at the mean indicators for the challenges, the participants felt challenged by language teaching tasks to a moderate degree (means varying from 3.3 to 2.15). Hence, none of them was perceived as hugely challenging and therefore insurmountable, or not challenging, in the least.

The comparative data yielded by the MANOVA technique pointed to a statistically significant difference in challenge perceptions between groups of EFL teachers with varying lengths of experience. It contradicts the findings of Valizadeh (2021), who did not establish a statistically significant difference in EFL teachers' views of challenges. At the same time, these findings comply with the prevailing number of studies pointing to the crucial role of teaching experience. The most striking discrepancies were observed on such language teaching tasks as teaching speaking, grammar, vocabulary, assessment, and motivation.

As expected, the challenge estimates encountered by novice teachers were higher than those of teachers with more than 20 years of experience. This finds partial corroboration in the studies focusing on the influence of teaching experience on multiple aspects, including teacher cognitions and teaching effectiveness (e.g. Podolsky, Kini & Darling-Hammond, 2019). One of the results of this investigation that runs counter to earlier research

was that the challenge estimates reported by teachers with 10-15 years of teaching experience turned out to be higher than those reported by novices. Thus, beginning language teachers in the study of Al-bdeerat et al. (2020) felt more challenged than their experienced counterparts. On the whole, difficulties and challenges teachers face in the early years have been widely treated in the literature (e.g., Maskit, 2013), and governments worldwide apply a lot of efforts to support them. These results suggest that as teachers mature professionally, they gain a deeper awareness of the intricacies and challenges of teaching. Cognition research has captured the transformations occurring in teacher beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge (Borg, 201 9). A useful lens, if we are to delve deeper into the interpretation of this study's outcomes, is the knowledge schema theory, which explicates the differences between novices and expert teachers. Experienced teachers have a much richer knowledge of all aspects of their work than novice teachers (Tsui, 2009). Consequently, a more sophisticated, elaborate professional knowledge enables experienced teachers to discern and assess language teaching challenges qualitatively differently from novices.

Limitations

A rather small sample size does not render it possible to generalise the outcomes of this study to a larger population of EFL teachers. Also, because the sample includes EFL teachers working only in Ukraine, the study does not claim to represent the target population of EFL teachers worldwide. Notwithstanding the study's limitations, it offers a revealing insight for both researchers and teacher educators by pointing out venues for the renewal of teacher development courses.

Conclusions

The findings of this study provide a window into the challenges encountered by EFL teachers throughout various periods in their professional lives. Prompted by the study's two-fold objectives, first, the challenge rates caused by language teaching were calculated. The participants self-reported being especially challenged by teaching speaking, learner motivation, teaching writing and listening, learner engagement, differentiating instruction, providing effective learning, knowing their learners, and teaching grammar. All groups of teachers alleged being challenged by language teaching tasks included in the study's instrument, although the average challenge rate was moderate. Next, the responses were compared between groups of teachers

with varying lengths of experience, and a statistically significant difference was established between them. As expected, novice teachers felt more challenged than the most experienced teachers. However, disparate results were derived from comparisons between groups of novices and their more experienced (10-15 years of teaching experience) colleagues. The latter appeared to demonstrate a greater awareness of language teaching challenges by indicating higher rates even than novices. Thus, it may be true that the novice stage of teaching is more labour-intensive and strewn with difficulties because teacher learning is highly active in this period. As Maskit (2013) explains, beginning teachers (1-4 years of experience) learn how to cope with difficulties and challenges. However, as suggested by the results of this study, EFL teachers at later stages of their careers also require assistance, though qualitatively different from novices.

   This research could evolve into a more in-depth analysis of language teachers' challenges, especially across cultural milieus. It would also be interesting to find out if there exists any association between language teaching challenges and mistakes committed in teaching. Finally, probing for challenging areas in language teachers' work can be illuminating in many respects. It can serve to define optimum curriculum content selection and organisation of teacher training and development both in Ukraine and worldwide.

SUMMARY

Even-though teaching experience has been identified as one of the main variables affecting student academic gains, teacher cognition, and practices, research focusing on the influence of experience on language teacher challenges is still rare. Hence, the study aims to analyse comparatively the challenges encountered by EFL teachers with varying length of teaching experience. Quantitative data were collected utilising a questionnaire involving 208 language teachers. The respondents self-reported being especially challenged by teaching speaking, learner motivation, teaching writing and listening, learner engagement, differentiating instruction, and providing effective learning. The overall challenge rate was moderate. Notably, a statistically significant difference in the perceptions of challenges was established between groups of teachers with varying lengths of teaching experience. As expected, novice teachers reported being more challenged than their most experienced counterparts. Contrary to popular belief, challenge estimates of a group of experienced teachers (10-15 years) were higher than that of less experienced teachers (1-5 years). The principal implication of the current study is that experienced language teachers also need assistance in dealing with professional challenges arising from the complexities of language teaching. To serve well, teacher development courses should be sensitive to language teacher needs and challenges, aligned with transformations they undergo as they move along the career stages.

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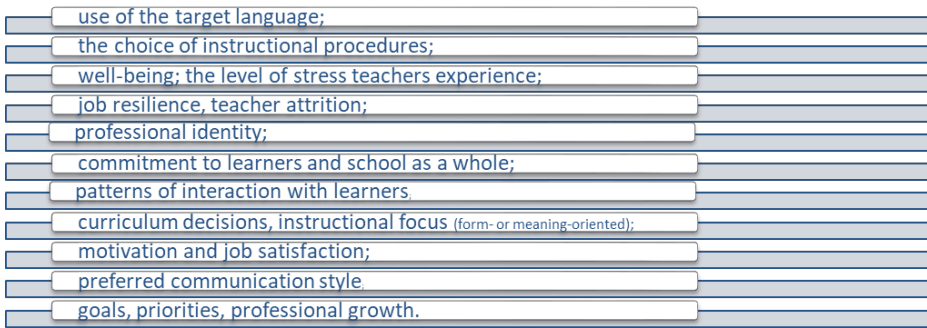
CHAPTER 4
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING CHALLENGES: CURRENT AND RETROSPECTIVE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS

It has been commonly observed that the quality of education is commensurate with the quality of teachers' work. Being held accountable for providing quality instruction and sustaining high standards in education has accelerated the level of challenge experienced by teachers. Unsurprisingly, considerable effort has been expended into the study of teaching challenges in general education. A sizeable body of research has addressed challenges faced by English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers (Akçor G., Savaşçı, 2020; Komar et al., 2021; Levrints/Lőrincz, 2022). Meanwhile, certain aspects of the delineated problem are still awaiting a more systematic response. Among them are the perceived challenges EFL teachers experience at the outset of their careers, and following a period spent in the profession. This study is, thus, guided by the following research question: what are the current and retrospective perceptions of challenges held by EFL teachers?

Challenges were studied in the literature through theoretical prisms of cognition and affect, intersecting beliefs, emotions, attitudes, etc. They refer to subjective perceptions of the task difficulty associated with language teaching. Perceptions of challenges affect teacher performance in multiple ways, as summarized in Figure 1. Based on an extant literature review, it was shown that challenges influenced the use of L2 by language teachers in the lessons (Lőrincz, 2022). Language proficiency was a decisive factor in determining the amount of time language teachers spent speaking L2 (Chambless, 2012). It also determined the general focus of the lesson, where more proficient teachers emphasized authentic communication in English while their less fluent colleagues preferred more grammar-focused instruction (Chacón, 2005). In their study, Back and Dean (2020) found that an insufficient level of language proficiency posed a serious challenge, diverting potential candidates from choosing a teaching career. Challenges stemming from insufficient command of EFL were also associated with the level of stress experienced by language teachers, causing feelings of insecurity and frustration (Richards, 2022, p. 228; Behroozi & Amoozegar, 2014). Challenges caused by classroom management issues and

student misbehavior also feature among potential sources of stress (Kyriacou, 2000). Especially vulnerable to the challenge of establishing rapport with learners are novice EFL teachers (Komar et al., 2021). In an interview study by Levrints/Lőrincz (2022) the participants often referred to challenges associated with learner rapport and discipline as one of the principal sources of stress, leading to teachers' contemplating quitting the profession. Perception of challenges was associated with a threat to EFL teachers' wellbeing, drops in teaching motivation, and teacher attrition in the study by Sulis et al. (2021). Difficulties experienced by language teachers also lead to identity transformations (e.g., Teng, 2017; Xu, 2012). In his study, Xu (2012) describes major shifts in teachers' identities as they tackle job-related challenges. Under contextual and job constraints, language teachers abandon their imagined professional identities and assume an identity shaped by attempts to align with the work environment. Perceptions of challenges often impact language teachers' communication styles. Student misbehavior, low confidence in their capability to answer complicated questions, and fear of language errors led teachers to adopt a more authoritarian style (Kyriacou, 2000; Sulis et al., 2021). Challenges experienced by novice teachers also led them to adopt a traditional language teaching approach, like grammar-translation, instead of the communicative approach endorsed by the language education program they attended (Akcan, 2016). In addition to the debilitating effect, the literature also mentions the facilitating effect challenges may have on teachers. Whereas tasks perceived as overly complicated diverted from learning at work, tasks viewed as doable led to professional growth (Hökkä et al., 2020). Likewise, the tension between teachers' aspirational identity and their current level of competence enhances professional development (Kubanyiova, 2012).

Although language teaching challenges have been addressed in the literature from different angles, how their perception transforms, beginning with the induction phase and beyond, has been overlooked. Even though several comparative studies of language teachers' challenges with varying lengths of experience were conducted (e.g., Valizadeh, 2021), a comparative analysis of within-subjects perceptions of challenges held by EFL teachers currently and in retrospect (i.e. experienced at the outset of teaching) could not be located. The study thus purports to investigate current and retrospective perceptions of challenges held by EFL teachers and whether their rates alter following a period of exposure to professional activity.

- use of the target language;
- the choice of instructional procedures;
- well-being; the level of stress teachers experience;
- job resilience, teacher attrition;
- professional identity;
- commitment to learners and school as a whole;
- patterns of interaction with learners,
- curriculum decisions, instructional focus (form- or meaning-oriented);
- motivation and job satisfaction;
- preferred communication style,
- goals, priorities, professional growth.

Figure 4.1. Influence of language teachers' perceptions of challenges on their performance (based on Lőrincz, 2022)

Research Methodology

Participants

The participants come from Ukrainian educational institutions where English is taught as a foreign language. In all, 208 language teachers consented to take part in the study. They were recruited utilizing a random sampling technique. The teachers occupied posts at different educational levels, from primary to tertiary. Their qualifications ranged from BA to DSC degrees. The latter roughly corresponds to a habilitated doctor in Ukraine. Their language teaching experience varied from 1 to more than 25 years.

Data collection and analysis

This study forms a part of a broader examination of EFL teaching challenges in the context of Ukraine. It is quantitative in nature, adopting a survey research design. The instrument of the study was a questionnaire initially used by Lőrincz & Greba, with minor adaptations made to meet the aims of this study. In particular, the respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they found the enumerated language teaching tasks challenging when they started teaching (2022). Next, they had to indicate how challenging these tasks were at the given moment. The responses were elicited on a five-point Likert scale where 1 stood for not challenging and 5 – most challenging.

The data were processed through Friedman's ANOVA (a nonparametric test in SPSS) and a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test which were used to test whether the rate of perceived challenge associated with EFL teaching decreased as teachers gained experience. Accordingly, the hypothesis was formulated as follows:

Null hypothesis: The mean ranks will be equal in the language teachers' current and retrospective perceptions of challenges.

Alternative hypothesis: The mean ranks will not be equal in the language teachers' current and retrospective perceptions of challenges.

Results

As can be seen in Table 4.1, the mean ranks for perceived challenges decreased as a result of teaching experience, which was evident in the case of all enumerated tasks displayed in the table's first column. Moreover, the difference between current and retrospective perceptions of challenges was statistically significant in all 15 cases (p < .001).

As indicated by the outputted data in Table 4.1, the null hypothesis of equal mean ranks is rejected. The Friedman's ANOVA analysis for teaching grammar yielded $\chi2(1) = 49.846$, (p < .001), 24,4% of the variance in the ranks is attributable to the research condition; teaching vocabulary results: $\chi2(1) = 34.945$, (p < .001), with 16,8% of the variance caused by experience; teaching pronunciation results: $\chi2(1) = 42.706$, (p < .001), with 20,5% of the variance caused by experience; teaching speaking results: $\chi2(1) = 28.69$, (p < .001), with 13,8% of the variance caused by experience; teaching reading: $\chi2(1) = 32.143$, (p < .001), with 15,5% of the variance caused by experience; teaching writing: $\chi2(1) = 44.885$, (p < .001), with 21,6% of the variance caused by experience; teaching listening: $\chi2(1) = 49,782$, (p < .001), with 23,9% of the variance caused by experience; planning and managing instruction: $\chi2(1) = 46.407$, (p < .001), with 22,3% of the variance caused by experience; assessing student's knowledge: $\chi2(1) = 34.133$, (p < .001), with 16,4% of the variance caused by experience; engaging all learners with the instructional material: $\chi2(1) = 75.111$, (p < .001), with 36,1% of the variance caused by experience; motivating learners; $\chi2(1) = 48.286$, (p < .001), with 23,2% of the variance caused by experience; knowing students: $\chi2(1) = 36.125$, (p < .001), with 17.4% of the variance caused by experience; providing effective instruction for all learners: $\chi2(1) = 58.696$, (p < .001), with 28.2% of the variance caused by experience; maintaining discipline: $\chi2(1) = 42.667$, (p < .001), with 20,5% of the variance caused by experience; differentiating instruction: $\chi2(1) = 57.042$, (p < .001), with 27.4% of the variance caused by experience.

Partial eta squared had a large effect in all cases indicating that experience was a decisive factor influencing teachers' perceptions of language

teaching challenges. Partial eta squared was the highest in the case of engaging all learners with language material ($\eta2= .361$), providing effective instruction for all learners (($\eta2= .282$), differentiating instruction ($\eta2= .274$), teaching grammar ($\eta2= .244$), teaching listening ($\eta2= .239$), motivating learners ($\eta2= .232$), planning for instruction ($\eta2= .223$), teaching writing ($\eta2= .216$), maintaining discipline ($\eta2= .205$). Thus, the enumerated aspects of language teaching accounted for the research condition (i.e., experience) to a greater extent and were more subject to the influence of teaching experience with a tendency to decrease over time. A decrease in the perceived challenge rates on other aspects of language teaching was accounted for by the research condition to a lesser degree. Consequently, teaching speaking ($\eta2= .138$), teaching reading ($\eta2= .155$), student assessment ($\eta2= .164$), teaching vocabulary ($\eta2= .168$) and knowing students ($\eta2= .174$) were also susceptible to the influence of conditions external to this study.

As shown in the table's last column, post hoc tests using a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test also produced similar to the above-displayed results, showing that experience reduced the level of challenge perceived by the given sample of EFL teachers. Thus, the participants reported feeling less challenged as they gained experience on all 15 variables, with a strong evidence obtained for engaging all learners with the instructional material (z=-8.311), differentiating instruction (z=-7,6), teaching listening (z=-7.358), teaching grammar (z=-6.905), teaching writing (z=-6.895), assessment (z=-6.954) and planning for instruction (z=-6.885). In other words, as teachers matured professionally, the challenges associated with these language teaching tasks decreased significantly, suggesting that teachers approach the above tasks with more confidence in their coping capabilities.

In addition, it was of interest what aspects of language instruction EFL teachers found most challenging as they embarked on the teaching career and to compare these findings with currently held views. As displayed in Table 4.1, in retrospect, teachers were most challenged by teaching speaking (M=3.76), engaging all learners (M=3.45), learner motivation (M=3.40), teaching writing (M=3.38), teaching listening (M=3.33), differentiating instruction (M=3.30), providing effective instruction for all learners (M=3.19), learner assessment (M=3.02), planning and managing instruction (M=3.00). However, a comparative analysis of means on retrospective and current views shows minor discrepancies. Although teaching speaking persisted as the most challenging task, learner motivation shifted to the

Table 4.1. EFL teachers' current and retrospective perceptions of challenges: within-subjects comparison

Challenges		Rank order	M	SD	Mean Rank	Kendall's W	Chi-Square	Sig.	Z
Teaching grammar	current	11	2.43	1.17	1.33	.244	49.846	.000	-6.905
	retrospective	13	2.9	1.27	1.67				
Teaching vocabulary	current	15	2.15	1.18	1.35	.168	34.945	.000	-5.425
	retrospective	15	2.54	1.22	1.65				
Teaching pronunciation	current	9	2.48	1.27	1.34	.205	42,706	.000	-6.56
	retrospective	11	2.96	1.16	1.7				
Teaching speaking	current	1	3.27	1.3	1.35	.138	28.69	.000	-5.134
	retrospective	1	3.76	1.2	1.65				
Teaching reading	current	14	2.38	1.7	1.36	.155	32.143	.000	-5.368
	retrospective	14	2.77	1.5	1.64				
Teaching writing	current	3	2.87	1.26	1.32	.216	44.885	.000	-6.895
	retrospective	4	3.38	1.15	1.68				
Teaching listening	current	4	2.78	1.2	1.32	.239	49.782	.000	-7.358
	retrospective	5	3.33	1.05	1.7				
Planning and managing instruction	current	13	2.38	1.17	1.32	.223	46.407	.000	-6.885
	retrospective	9	3	1.13	1.68				
Assessing students' knowledge	current	10	2.44	1.2	1.35	.164	34.133	.000	-6.954
	retrospective	8	3.02	1.25	1.65				
Engaging all learners with the instructional material	current	5	2.64	1.2	1.25	.361	75.111	.000	-8.311
	retrospective	2	3.45	1.2	1.75				
Motivating learners	current	2	2.89	1.25	1.31	.232	48.286	.000	-6.119
	retrospective	3	3.4	1.35	1.69				
Knowing students	current	8	2.48	1.35	1.34	.174	36.125	.000	-5.461
	retrospective	10	2.97	1.28	1.66				
Providing effective instruction for all learners	current	7	2.58	1.3	1.28	.282	58.696	.000	-6.746
	retrospective	7	3.19	1.15	1.72				
Maintaining discipline	current	12	2.38	1.28	1.35	.205	42.667	.000	-6.767
	retrospective	12	2.92	1.27	1.65				
Providing differentiated instruction	current	6	2.6	1.24	1.28	.274	57.042	.000	-7.6
	retrospective	6	3.3	1.07	1.72				

third place in the list, and so did the responses about engaging all learners with the instructional material (from 2nd to 5th place). Meanwhile, teaching writing and listening have shifted to the 3rd and 4th places in the ranks of challenges. The respondents also reported differences in the challenge rates related to engaging all learners and planning for instruction, which were initially considered more complicated than at the given moment. It can be inferred that many language teaching aspects continue to be perceived as challenging despite a period of exposure to professional activity.

Discussion

This study addressed current and retrospective perceptions of challenges by EFL teachers. The quantitative data were collected by means of a questionnaire and processed through Friedman's ANOVA of SPSS. The results of the present study indicate that experience is a causal factor accounting for the decrease in the perceived rate of challenge associated with tasks of FL teaching. The participants unequivocally reported feeling less challenged by all aspects of language teaching included in the study's instrument following a period spent in the profession. This result was partly corroborated in earlier research, which investigated the impact of experience on language teacher cognitions and teaching effectiveness (Borg, 2019; Levrints/Lőrincz, 2022; Podolsky et al., 2019). In particular, it also showcased the impact of the length of experience on language teachers' professional mindset and perceived competence (Lőrincz M., Greba, 2022; Levrints/Lőrincz, 2021).

However, the present study has additionally documented that the most substantial transformations in the teachers' perceptions occurred in relation to such tasks as student engagement with instructional material, ability to provide effective instruction for all learners, and personalizing teaching. Strong evidence for transformations was also evinced for teaching grammar, listening, and instructional planning, indicating that the respondents attributed their heightened coping capabilities to the experience gained due to engagement with these tasks. Conversely, teaching experience was reported to play a less significant role in the case of teaching speaking, teaching vocabulary, teaching reading, learner assessment, motivation, and knowing students. It could indicate that the participants attributed the rate of challenge on these tasks to other linguistics and psychological aspects of instructed language acquisition.

A comparative within-subjects data analysis revealed that only slight changes occurred in the ranks of perceptions of challenges held by EFL teachers initially and after a period of engagement with language teaching. With minor exceptions, the rank order remained similar on most teaching tasks. Thus, the participants asserted that teaching speaking and learner motivation remained the most challenging tasks despite experience, which accords with previous research. Notably, a large-scale study by Copland et al. involving 4456 language teachers established that teaching speaking and learner motivation were the principal language teaching challenges (2014). Furthermore, teaching writing and listening were considered rather challenging, both initially and after a period spent teaching in the present study. Conversely, the rank order was somewhat different in the case of learner engagement with the instructional material, planning, and managing instruction, which were considered rather challenging in retrospect and less so with experience.

Limitations

This study presents the results of a rather small-scale investigation tackling only a few of the multiple areas of language teaching which potentially challenge language teachers. Likewise, due to a small research sample (n=208) and its limitation to the context of Ukraine, this study does not claim the generalizability of its findings. Nevertheless, these findings could be revealing in highlighting the tasks posing a substantial challenge to EFL teachers both at the outset of their career and following years spent in it.

Conclusions

As shown by the results of the present study, experience is a causal factor contributing to transformations in the perception of challenges by EFL teachers. A comparative within-subjects analysis of current and retrospective perceptions of challenges captured a statistically significant difference in all language teaching tasks included in the study's instrument, yielding a large effect size. It indicates that teachers become more confident in their coping capabilities as they gain experience. Notably, further analysis of the data provides a window into the areas deserving more attention in the periods of initial teacher education, which differ to some extent from those required by more experienced language teachers. Specifically, during the induction period, EFL teachers need more support in such areas as learner engagement with language material, providing effective instruction for all

learners, personalizing instruction (providing differentiated and individualized instruction), knowing students, planning and managing instruction, and learner assessment. Interestingly, these areas pose less challenge for language teachers as they mature professionally. By contrast, teaching speaking, learner motivation, teaching writing, and listening featured among very challenging tasks viewed both currently and in retrospect, warranting additional preparation in these areas in the context of initial teacher education and professional development courses. Finally, as suggested by the results, none of the language teaching areas tackled in the questionnaire was considered not challenging by teachers even after years spent in the profession, pivoting the critical role of lifelong learning. The further prospect of this study could include an analysis of relationship between language teachers' challenges and mistakes they commit.

SUMMARY

While teaching challenges have been shown to affect teacher performance in multiple ways, little is known about the transformations occurring in language teachers' perceptions of challenges over time. Hence, this study purported to analyze EFL teachers' current and retrospective perceptions of challenges associated with language teaching tasks. Quantitative data were collected utilizing a questionnaire and processed through Friedman's ANOVA and a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test. A within-subjects comparison revealed a statistically significant difference between current and retrospective perceptions of challenges with a large effect size on all language teaching tasks included in the questionnaire, indicating that experience was a causing variable contributing to transformations in teachers' perceptions of task difficulty. The principal shifts in the participants' views were documented on such tasks as student engagement with language material, effective instruction for all learners, personalizing teaching, and planning and managing instruction. The teaching experience played a less decisive role in the case of teaching speaking, student motivation, teaching vocabulary, teaching reading, student assessment, and knowing students. Notably, the areas persisting as very challenging regardless of experience were teaching speaking, motivating learners, teaching writing, and listening. The study's findings hold implications for initial teacher preparation and development, highlighting areas calling for more attention.

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CHAPTER 5
A CORPUS ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE TEACHING CHALLENGES

The spread of lingual globalization is fast transfiguring the exigencies of language learners and teachers, posing the latter with a gamut of professional challenges. As a result, a vibrant academic discussion has ensued on multiple issues related to language teaching challenges. Due to the richness of the accumulated academic discourse over the last years, synthesizing typical themes associated with language teaching challenges has become a cumbersome undertaking employing theoretical research methods (e.g., literature review). Therefore, to approach this task with a more cogent research design, it was predicted that corpus methods could serve such ends. By exploiting the potential of a computer to compile and analyze large amounts of textual data, it is possible to unravel the recurrent academic narratives tackling language teaching challenges.

This study thus aims to analyze the themes and concepts prominently featured in the discussion of language teaching challenges in flagship journals. It also probes for the validity of corpus linguistics methods in like explorations. The analysis is based on a specialized corpus compiled for this study (638312 tokens) comprising journal articles on the outlined problem. The study seeks to answer the following research questions: What are the typical academic discourses addressing language teaching challenges? Can corpus methods provide a valid lens for understanding the recurring themes in the academic discourse? The study is organized as follows: the discussion commences with locating the study in the appropriate theoretical and methodological framework. Next, the data collection procedure and methodology are presented. Finally, the analysis and discussion of the obtained data are provided.

In recent decades the sphere of application of corpus methods has broadened exponentially. Over the period forerunning corpus linguistics, researchers limited their attention to the observation of comparatively small pools of textual data, with findings occasionally falling prey to human arbitrariness. The advent of computerized analytical tools has enhanced the processing of large amounts of linguistic data while reducing the subjectivity inherent in human reasoning and inferencing. One of the fields extensively drawing upon corpus linguistics is discourse interpretation (Baker, 2006; Friginal & Hardy, 2020) and, in particular, the study of academic discourse (Hyland, 2012). A common observation in literature is that the linguistic

patterning of texts within a specific communication domain sheds light on the language users' views and experiences in a given field and their interpretation of reality (Brezina et al., 2015; O'Halloran, 2010). Summarizing the benefits of corpus methods, Hyland (2012) points out that they focus "on community practices and the ways members of particular disciplines understand the world and talk about these understandings" (p. 30). Hence, corpus-assisted analysis enables the navigation of large data sets for discourses or themes high on the academic agenda with more precision and rigor.

Delineation of typical themes is usually the purview of qualitative analysis. As a rule, it is accomplished through literature perusal. Ryan and Bernard (2003) pertinently remark that themes "come from already-agreed-upon professional definitions, from local common-sense constructs, and researchers' values, theoretical orientation, and personal experience with the subject matter" (p. 86). However, qualitative analysis of themes comes with caveats that can be precluded by adding a quantitative dimension to the research paradigm.

Social researchers embarking on the analysis of themes can avail with several techniques, among which are the analysis of keywords, their frequencies, and their use in context (Brezina et al., 2015; Gabrielatos, 2018; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Although the application of corpus methods in the analysis of difficulties experienced in language education is a new terrain and is relatively idiosyncratic, it is the 's ambition to refine the inferences drawn from previous research and provide evidence of the expediency of corpus linguistics in uncovering the recurring discourses in academia. As Ryan and Bernard (2003) argue, social scientists are methodologically creative in deriving and interpreting textual data. Correspondingly, with a creative mind, the extant information coming in the form of textual data on copiously researched and debated issues could be systematized.

Since the author of this study has extensively read and written about the challenges of language teaching and has a wide range of practical experience in language teaching and language teacher preparation, the overriding interest was to approach this problem from a novel stance.

Method

This study takes a corpus-assisted approach to investigate discourses of language teaching challenges in academic texts. In doing so, it relies on the conceptual and methodological framework deployed primarily by corpus linguists. The study proceeds with the assumption that the exploitation of

corpus methods could enable the attainment of the objectives compatible with an extensive literature review. Moreover, exposure of the linguistic patterns of any given academic narrative could result in a higher level of synthesis and systematicity of research findings. This is not to say that a traditional literature review could be supplanted; rather, the two approaches could be complementary in producing more reliable research findings.

This study uses a specialized corpus of 638312 tokens compiled with the help of a digital data aggregator service LexisNexis. The search was narrowed to scientific publications and journals dealing with language teaching challenges. Accordingly, the search terms were language teaching or teachers' challenges. The aggregator service collected only excerpts of journal articles addressing the above issue. The lemma *challenge* appeared either in the manuscript's title or the text. The excerpts were thoroughly sifted through before their inclusion in the target corpus. In all, 1805 article excerpts were selected based on their relevance to the research area.

As displayed in Figure 5.1, only the papers from the top-ranking journals were considered.
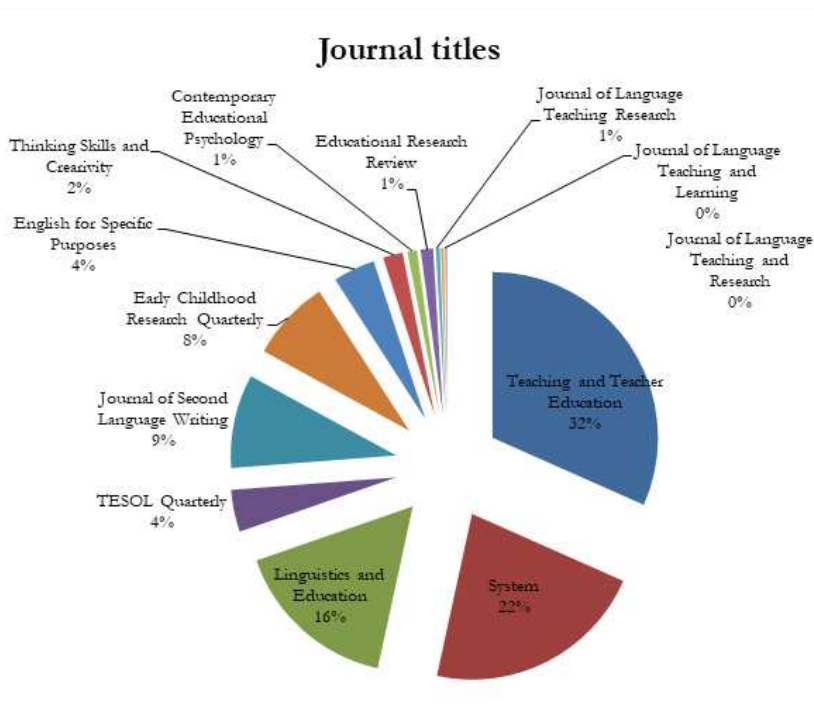

Figure 5.1. Journal titles and percentage of article excerpts

Thus, recurring themes in language teaching challenges research were explored with the help of corpus techniques. The principal research tool was the LancsBox software package. Among its numerous functions, the program runs statistical techniques of keyword and collocations analyses (Brezina et al., 2021). Keyword analysis has been widely used to observe statistically significant words in a corpus. It is considered a standard procedure in analyzing texts and highlighting their topical themes together with the collocation analysis (Rayson, 2019; O'Halloran, 2010; Baron et al., 2009). Keywords were defined as "words which are statistically more salient in a text or set of texts than in a larger reference corpus" (O'Halloran, 2010, p. 566). Keywords are calculated by comparing the word frequencies of a target corpus with a larger reference corpus (Baron et al., 2009). The exposure of a keyword profile serves to discern the dominant narratives of a text or its aboutness. The notion of aboutness refers to the prevalent themes and concepts in a corpus (Gabrielatos, 2018). Next, to bring out the best in corpus analysis the technique of collocation analysis was applied in this study. As posited by Brezina et al. (2015), words are organized in a network-like fashion within a text collocating with one another. Through their observation relationship between the choice of language means and the discourse community could be understood (p. 139).

Thus, the research procedure commenced with the generation of keywords using the Word technique of the LancsBox. The LOB corpus served as the study's reference corpus as it includes an "Academic Writing" subsection. The choice fell on this corpus since, as reasoned by Geluso et al. (2019), "a reference corpus of the same sub-register will highlight words that are particular to a specific target corpus" (p. 231). The top one hundred positive keywords were selected for in-depth analysis. The MI statistical association measure produced the exclusive collocates of the lemma challenge. The following parameters were applied: span: 5-5, statistical procedure − MI, statistic value threshold - 5.0| CPN: 03 - MI (5.0)/ L5-R5/ C: 20.0-NC: 20.0.

Following the above-presented quantitative phase of language data analysis, a qualitative interpretation of the keywords' use in context was performed by means of the KWIK technique. The analysis of concordance lines is practical because it helps to disambiguate the dematerialized lemmas and reveal the patterning of themes.

Findings and discussions

Findings

The keywords produced by the above-described procedure were organized thematically to uncover the recurring discourses. The keywords were ordered into thematic groups based on their meaning and statistic values (Table 5.1). As noted by Baker et al. (2013), rendering keywords into themes relies not so much on the denotative component of the lexeme's meaning as on the topics they index.

Table 5.1. Keywords organized thematically

Themes	Keywords
Agents/ Subjects	(1) teacher (f=18820, sv=148.2730732594), (5) learner (f=1517, sv=25.6279677377), (7) student (f=4101, sv= 22.016539532), (31) educator (f=497, sv= 9.7091419506), (43) pre-service (f=313, sv= 6.606194), (47) novice (f=307, sv= 6.133518885), (65) in-service (f=219, sv=4.922545), (44) multilingual (f=298, sv= 6.337527), (53) international (f=343, sv= 5.5471182824), (70) bilingual (f=210, sv= 4.761344)
Objects	(2) language (f=14823, sv=91.7256678319), (4) classroom (f=2380, sv= 40.419617173), (13) English_n (f=1716, sv= 17.5934403982), (15) EFL (f=820, sv= 15.687155), (16) English_adj (f=2100, sv= 15.5163061386), (19) program (f=728, sv= 14.039328), (33) foreign (f=1021, sv= 9.4452936115), (54) school (f=1887, sv= 5.4638949916), (71) university (f=820, sv= 4.7219560812), (78) tesol (f=182, sv= 4.259832)
Instructional processes	(3) teaching (f=4751, sv=59.1117312452), (6) education (f=4784, sv= 25.2633479389), (8) learning (f= 1216, sv= 21.104470947), (r=9) teach (f=2299, sv=21.064606541), (10) study (f=2893, sv=20.5676631634), (11) research (f=2626, sv=18.4910067774), (14) practice (f=1985, sv= 15.8244792947), (21) learn (f=2821, sv= 13.8547088361), (22) instruction (f=1109, sv=13.8525152462), (23) interaction (f=699, sv= 12.6417215304), (29) development (f=1836, sv= 10.2609213206)
Research foci	(12) challenge (f=1182, sv=17.9062327366), (17) context (f=1170, sv= 14.8719247492), (18) identity (f=944, sv= 14.6989955053), (26) belief (f=1048, sv= 11.2071418611), (27) online (f=554, sv= 10.922785), (28) curriculum (f=600, sv= 10.4966901561), (35) role (f=775, sv= 8.6795111154), (36) assessment (f=588, sv= 8.434702501), (41) motivation (f=382, sv= 7.332685347), (42) knowledge (f=1177, sv= 7.229789505), (45) approach (f=659, sv= 6.3315965706), (46) feedback (f=290, sv= 6.194238), (49) technology (f=336, sv= 6.0050662913), (50) agency (f=355, sv= 5.9430054952), (57) cognition (f=246, sv= 5.3530226037), (59) competence (f=270, sv= 5.214982584), (60) emotion (f=340, sv= 5.1857040143), (64) reflection (f=312, sv= 5.0383080027),

Table 5.1 (continued)

Themes	Keywords
Research foci	(67) awareness (f=268, sv= 4.9211346403), (75) ideology (f=232, sv= 4.4874079193), (77) self-efficacy (f=186, sv= 4.331477)
Competence areas	(30) skill (f=866, sv=10.2218183011), (39) proficiency (f=362, sv= 7.4103011712), (48) writing (f=453, sv= 6.091305856), (68) vocabulary (f=299, sv= 4.8974103693), (79) communication (f=279, sv= 4.2329298419), (81) communicative (f=179, sv= 4.206098), (82) culture (f=277, sv= 4.0652719311), (99) grammar (f=208, sv= 3.5073129603)

f—frequency
sv—statistical value

The group of lexemes with the highest statistical values pertained to the agents and objects of the language teaching/learning process. In tackling the language teaching challenges, the researchers ascribe the leading role to the teacher as seen by the lemma's statistical value (sv=148.2730732594), although lemmas learner and student are also frequent and highly significant in the corpus. However, this result could have been predetermined by the search terms used in this study (i.e., language teaching/teachers' challenges). Further qualitative analysis of concordance lines supported the obtained numeric result, whereby the language teacher was treated as the principal actor in the instructional process, with students seen by the researchers as subject to teachers' influence and playing a subsidiary role. This tendency holds strong along most concordance lines, as illustrated below:

…Sakai & Kikuchi (2009) point out that teachers have a very significant role in inspiring…

…in identifying teachers' professional problems. As aforementioned, teachers have a critical part in the learning…

…Ornstein & Hunking (2010) state that teacher is the most itative implementer of ….the most …itative implementer of the curriculum. A teacher can be called as the main source…

…be adopted through the teaching process. Thus, teachers have to select the most appropriate and…

…significant impact on teacher's production of qualified students. Teaching language necessitates experiencing different approaches, methods,…

…gets more difficult for teachers to encourage students to be enthusiastic in using English due…

...These challenges stem from the teacher, the students, and the educational system (Ozsevik, 2010)...

There is a general trend in research to emphasize the challenges experienced by *pre-service* and *novice* language teachers. The study of *in-service* language teachers' challenges is a step behind, with a greater focus laid on their professional development, as shown in the concordance lines *below:*

...Given high attrition amidst teachers, we study pre-service teachers' identity expectations in a Canadian context....

...to document the benefits and challenges for pre-service teachers and cooperating teachers who...

...Due to contextual and personal challenges pre-service language teachers face, they may lose...

...Challenges encountered by pre-service language teachers can potentially threaten their well-being...

...and learners with learning disabilities as challenges novice EFL teachers face in Turkey...

...described the challenges which novice EFL teachers perceived. Challenges related to classroom...

...challenging is sustaining a new approach once teachers' commitment to professional development ends, and supportive facilitation...

A considerable body of research documents the challenges of teaching *international* students. The issues of *multilingualism* and *bilingualism* are also high on the research agenda, as displayed in these examples:

... including many migrants and international students with English as an additional language, ...
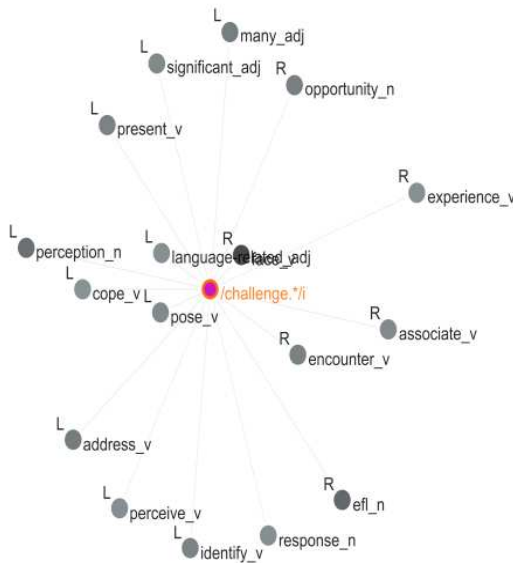
... relevance and value of multilingualism: "students should experience that mastering several languages is...

... noted, the scholarship on teaching multilingual students "presents a collection of disconnected strategies....

... teachers' understandings of how multilingual students from immigrant backgrounds learn new languages, in...

High frequencies and salience levels were documented for lemmas *language, English, EFL, foreign*, and *TESOL*, as well as for the lemmas *classroom, program, school*, and *university*. Such a result was anticipated due to the status of English as a lingua franca and the enormous number of learners who presently study English as a second/foreign language (L2).

The treatment of diverse research foci came out as the most lexically rich theme of the target corpus. As expected, a highly significant lemma was *challenge*. As displayed in Figure 2, among the close collocates of this lemma were *language-related, pose, cope, encounter*, and *experience*. The collocation analysis disclosed the facilitative nature of challenges suggested by such first-rate collocates as *cope, opportunity*, and *address*. Likewise, the most pertinent challenges experienced by language teachers were related to the language, as shown by the node's closest collocate, i.e., the lemma *language-related*.

**Figure 5.2. Results of collocation analysis of lemma "challenge"
in the target corpus**

The common themes associated with language teaching challenges outputted by keyword analysis were referenced by the lemmas *context, identity, belief, online*, and others, as presented in the column "Research focus" of Table 5.1. Researchers treat challenges mainly as context-specific deriving from micro- and macro-levels rather than generalizing them to the international context. There is a tendency to investigate challenges in the context of a geographical setting, educational institution, learners, and discipline, as can be seen below:

…been diagnosed as a strenuous task for teachers in the Iraqi context in particular…

…in a Turkish education context: Considering the challenges, suggestions and benefits from EFL teachers' perspectives….

…in their classrooms. This poses quite a challenge in the Malaysian context since English is…

…of the real classroom context and the challenges teachers face in their teaching. Borg (2015)…

…help them cope with contextual challenges and facilitate their continuing development in higher…

The study of language teaching challenges was found to be closely aligned with teacher identity observations, as corroborated by the high significance of the lemma identity. The following concordance lines illustrate this finding:

... The kind of professional identity that teachers construct can impact their practice. Drawing on…

…The rapidly changing environment is a challenge to the teaching identity developed over time;…

…conflicts and transformation. Special Issue on Language Teacher Identity in Multilingual Teaching. TESOL Quarterly, 50(3),…

…professional identity serves as the linchpin of teacher development, teaching efficiency, teaching satisfaction, teacher commitment,…

An increasing number of publications consider language teaching challenges through the prism of teachers' *beliefs* (f=1048, sv=11.2071418611). Language teacher beliefs were among the principal issues of language teacher education programs and development, hampering the implementation of innovative methodologies in the instructional process, as also displayed in these examples:

…a better way to teach but…": EFL   teachers' conflicting beliefs about grammar teaching…

…a growing recognition of the importance of teacher beliefs and practices, those of novice EFL…

…teacher educators must develop deeper understandings of teachers' beliefs about their abilities to implement CRI…

…learning under the shadow of conflict: Teachers' beliefs about teaching the language of the "other"…

As expected, a high statistical value was calculated for the lemma *online,* reflecting the challenges of online education spurred by the Covid

pandemic. The transition to online education is treated in the literature as particularly challenging, requiring researchers' heightened attention, as shown in the concordance lines below:

…in emergency online teaching which created additional challenges and stressors…

…Addressing the challenges of interaction in online language courses…

…Teaching and learning languages online: Challenges and responses… outbreak of COVID-19 generated…

…generated an unprecedented global push towards remote online language teaching and learning…

…learners have experienced in teaching and learning online, explores how they have addressed these challenges…

The constraints imposed by the *curriculum* requirements transpired as one of the principal challenges treated in the literature. Problems associated with curriculum implementation by teachers, curriculum reforms, curricula of teacher education programs, content integrated language curriculum surface as common topics addressed in the target corpus:

…practicum experiences of English Language Major student teachers during a period of profound curriculum reform…

…notion of emotional capital and reveal that teacher engagement in curriculum implementation is an emotionally…

…explores how a group of novice English teachers (n=285) appropriated the national curriculum standards in…

High statistical values were documented for the lemma *skill*. The analysis of concordance lines revealed that it was associated with students' language skills or teaching skills, as the following examples illustrate. However, the various language competence areas, including the four language skills (speaking, writing, listening, and reading), were underrepresented in the target corpus.

…exploring English language proficiency, linguistic challenges, and academic language skills of Japanese students…

…students experienced significantly different levels of linguistic related challenges in each language skill when at a…

…theorised and the knowledge and skills that teachers need in order to function as effective…

…on provision of basic skills to prepare teachers for their first experiences with teaching…

…and few differences related to teacher pedagogical skill or intervention condition. Language use…

The lemma *role* came up as a significant keyword of the target corpus. In the majority of instances, it was used in relation to teacher roles or in a generic sense. The discussion revolved around the changing roles of language teachers, a repertoire of language teachers' roles, and their seminal role in language education as displayed in the following concordance lines:

…teachers need to consider more than one role in the classroom. Teachers have to focus…

…out that teachers have a very significant role in inspiring students in language learning…

….Review 2. 1 English Teacher's Role and Teaching Difficulties English has been presented…

…Teacher could engage a number of major roles in classroom: Controller (teacher is fully responsible…

…and inexperienced teachers all play a critical role to the teaching of English. To figure…

…English teachers worldwide play a seminal role in the development of English competence …

The challenges associated with language teachers' and learners' motivation were among the recurring concepts of the target corpus, as obviated by high statistical values of the lemma *motivation*. Lack of learner motivation featured as the principal source of difficulties faced by language teachers:

…learner proficiency in English, lack of learner motivation and interest for English, dealing with individual…

…teachers in the first place, increasing teacher motivation by increasing payment and respecting their beliefs…

…problem of Turkish EFL learners' lack of motivation and interest was also already found in…

…points out the necessity to focus on teacher motivation, the interaction among teachers…

The high frequency of the lemma *knowledge* foregrounds its place in the investigation of language teaching challenges. One of the oft-cited issues in this respect concerns the role of professional knowledge held by language teachers, knowledge construction by language teachers, the knowledge base of language teacher education, and the development of learners' knowledge:

…in teacher education. • Finnish teachers had knowledge about second language acquisition and positive attitudes…

…Reconceptualizing and describing teachers' knowledge of language for content and language integrated…

…authentic materials, a focus on subject matter knowledge and language awareness-based activities had a positive…

…crossing the boundary between language and content knowledge. The study suggests that when creating cross-curricular…

The high salience of the lemma *approach* highlights a consistent theme of the target corpus. A qualitative interpretation of the concordance lines showed that challenges were discussed in relation to the implementation of contemporary language teaching approaches:

…found classroom management, implementation of the communicative approach in classrooms, unmotivated students and learners with…

…that the old-fashioned grammar-based teacher-centered English teaching approach has been the main challenge of speaking…

…the effects of a widely supported teaching approach, task-based or task-supported language teaching, on L2…

…and classroom practices in the ESP genre-based approach to teaching writing…

The common topics addressed in the literature on challenges were language teacher *cognitions, competence, emotions, reflection, reflective, ideology*, and *self-efficacy*, represented in the target corpus through the lemmas accordingly. Language teacher cognitions is an umbrella term covering a range of concepts, like challenges, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and motives, to name just a few. As such, its salience in the target corpus was unsurprising. Contrary to expectations, the lemma *non-native* exhibited relatively low salience in the target corpus (f=112, sv=3.00605).

As revealed by the keyword analysis, the customarily targeted competence areas were alluded to by the lemmas *proficiency, writing, vocabulary, communication*, and *communicative*. Given this, they posed a considerable challenge in language education. A detailed analysis of concordance lines revealed that the lemma *proficiency* was frequently used in the context of students' and teachers' levels of language proficiency:

…are primarily recruited based on their English proficiency and knowledge of teaching methods rather than…

…rather than their teaching potential. While language proficiency is an important predictor of the success…

…revealed that in both subjects, English language proficiency statistically significantly predicted academic language-related challenges. Furthermore,…

...a gain in English proficiency significantly predicted the challenges in International…

High statistical values were registered for the lemma *writing*, which was unsurprising. As seen from the journal titles, which entered the target corpus (e.g., Journal of Second Language Writing), writing competence is of primary concern in L2 education. The typical discourses of the target corpus were also vocabulary teaching and its acquisition:

…writing concepts for teaching purposes: Preservice L2 writing teachers' developing conceptual understanding of parallelism…

…relevant to L1-to-L2 rhetorical transfer in L2 writing: The cases of Chinese EFL writers across…

…particularly meaningful for the foreign language (FL) writing instruction in an acquisition insufficient environment where L1-to-L…

…most challenging tasks students encountered is mastering vocabulary. Maruyama (1996)....

…taught through English obtained a larger academic vocabulary size and encountered fewer linguistic challenges adjusting…

The lemmas *communicative* and *communication* were likewise commonly referenced in the frame of language teaching challenges. These lemmas frequently combined with the concepts of oral proficiency, intercultural communication, and communicative approach in language teaching, as seen in the following excerpts:

… ESL students learn only the basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) from their English language lessons…

…lingua franca for international trade and intercultural communication, English language education has become a complex…

…L2 learners' lack of behavioral engagement in communication and interaction using the target language'…

…crowded classes, lack of time to prepare communicative materials, loaded curriculums, technology and equipment deficiencies….

…found classroom management, implementation of the communicative approach in classrooms, unmotivated students and learners…

Other referenced themes in the target corpus concerned the challenges associated with teaching *culture* and *grammar*, as illustrated in these concordance lines:

…challenge their stereotypical impressions of Chinese educational culture but also facilitated their language use and…

…Iranian EFL teachers' self-reported and enacted culture teaching techniques: A case study…

…it is a long-held axiom that teaching culture is a part of second/foreign language (L2)…

…poses more than technical challenges of teaching grammar and vocabularies; rather, hegemonic attitudes prevalent among…

…use more traditional teaching methods like grammar translation which does not require a full…

Overall, challenges of teaching language skills received relatively little attention in the target corpus, as suggested by the numeric data obtained on the lemmas, respectively, e.g., listening (f=38, sv=1.616458673), reading (f=302, sv=3.154000562).

Discussion

In this paper, the study of language teaching challenges was approached from the premises of corpus linguistics. Although it somewhat steers away from the mainstream application of corpus analysis methods, the study has nevertheless borne out its adequacy in exploring the dominant discourses of language education challenges. The investigation proceeded with a compilation of a specialized corpus of academic texts, which was next subject to a quantitative analysis of its linguistic features, ending with a qualitative analysis of the linguistic environment in which they occurred.

Based on the keyword profile of the target corpus, the frequently referenced themes were organized into groups. As signaled by the frequency and salience features of the keywords, the most commonly explicated were the issues of agents/subjects and objects in language education, the instructional process itself, the research foci, and competence areas, which were closely aligned and partly overlapped. The principle findings obtained in this study are commensurate with and replicate previous research on language teaching challenges and, in particular, the field of language teacher education. Thus, the lemmas *pre-service* and *novice* featured more saliently than *in-service*, which was expected in terms of challenges faced by language teachers. For instance, after a period spent in the profession, EFL teachers reported feeling less challenged by all aspects of language teaching included in the study of Lőrincz (2022). The teaching experience was likewise found to be a causal factor leading to drops in the perceived rate of language teaching challenges (ibid; Lőrincz et al., 2022).

Since language teaching and learning are situated, the high salience of the lemma context in the target corpus was predictable. Embedded in the socio-cultural perspective (Johnson, 2009), the interpretation of challenges in language education research is inevitably shaped by the context in which language instruction takes place (Poedjiastutiea et al., 2021). The existing scholarship, therefore, treats the challenges of language teaching and learning as context-dependent. Similarly, owing to the unprecedented spread of English as a lingua franca, it is presently being taught in increasingly diverse contexts involving diverse student populations, educators, or language learning objectives (Crandall et al., 2016). This observation is echoed in the target corpus through the lemmas international, multilingual as descriptors of educational contexts and student populations.

The concept of identity transpired as the field's overriding concern, as indexed by this study's findings, which reprises previous research. In their book, Crandall et al. (2016) highlight teacher identity as a central research area attracting heightened attention in English language teacher education and development research. Challenges were shown to interact with teacher identity causing considerable transformations in the latter. Thus, challenges caused by the dissonance between teachers' aspirations and actual performance enhanced their professional growth (Kubanyiova, 2012). Job-related challenges shaped language teachers' identity, which strongly depended on the workplace's context in the study by Xu (2012).

Significant statistical values of the lemmas proficiency, language, English, EFL, and skill documented in this study epitomize the status English enjoys in the globalized world, stipulating the need for language proficiency by broad learner populations, as well as the level of language proficiency required of teachers. As corroborated in the existing research, language proficiency has gained unseen currency in applied linguistics (Borg, 2011; Crandall et al., 2016; Freeman, 2017). Contiguous with heightened expectations, language proficiency has become a topmost challenge faced by language specialists, which finds reflection in the high statistical values obtained on this theme in the target corpus.

Expectedly, among the dominant discourses of the target corpus, as signaled by the lemma *online*, are the challenges imposed by the transition to online education, much in line with the recent research trend (e.g., Bezliudnyi et al., 2022; Huszti et al., 2022). Accentuated in the corpus are the issues of language teacher roles, teacher and learner motivation, the knowledge

base of language teachers, language teaching approaches, reprising the observations of the available examinations. To mention just a few of these, attending to learner motivation was found to be the second most challenging task in the quantitative studies of challenges conducted by Copland et al. (2014), and (2022b). The critical role of pre-service teachers' language learning motivation in challenging circumstances was accentuated by Zadorozhna and Datskiv (2022). The shifts in language teacher roles prompted by the transformation in educational models likewise received extensive treatment in the field (Levrints/Lőrincz, 2020). The problems of language teachers' professional knowledge received broad coverage in language education research, as pointed out by Borg (2011). Mapping out the domains of knowledge language teachers should develop, the researchers conclude that expectations of language teachers' knowledge have recently multiplied compared to previous expectations (Levrints/Lőrincz, 2022a). As indicated by the study's findings, the treatment of language skills through the lens of teaching challenges is relatively overlooked. Except for second language writing and occasional exploration of difficulties of teaching grammar, vocabulary, and implementation of communicative language teaching, there is a dearth of studies addressing other language competence areas. Contrary to expectations, the challenges experienced by non-native language teachers appeared less frequently in the target corpus than indicated by the available research, whose lack of confidence and language proficiency are under the lens of researchers (Levrints/Lőrincz, 2022c; Richards, 2022). At the same time, since the majority of L2 teachers have a non-native language background, the researchers may not feel it urgent to acknowledge this fact when describing the study's participants.

Further discussion of the transpired themes and concepts of the target corpus is beyond the ambit of this publication. Altogether, the research perspective adopted in this study resulted in the outcomes reinforcing the accumulated findings in the field.

Conclusions

This study purported to explore the academic discourses on language teaching challenges by leveraging corpus methods. Additionally, it probed for the validity of the applied methodology. Numerous parallels were drawn between the results of this study and those of the mainstream research ob-

tained from various methodological designs. Among the dominant themes covered in the target corpus concerning language teaching challenges were the agents and objects of language education, the instructional process, the research foci, and competence areas in language education. The findings underscore the critical role of English as the principal language studied in various ESL/EFL contexts and the respective challenges, the situated nature of language teaching challenges, language teacher identity, language proficiency, online education, motivation, and others. Interestingly, the development of language competence areas was less frequently discussed in the target corpus than expected.

As shown, among the principal merits of corpus methods is their potential to showcase the research venues at the forefront of the academic discourse by observing linguistic patterns of language items that express the respective concepts. Nevertheless, the keyword analysis per se is relatively shallow and has little to offer in terms of in-depth analysis of factors posing challenges to language teachers, as in our case. But coupled with a qualitative analysis of concordance lines, it overcomes many of the shortcomings of quantitative methods. The application of corpus analysis can enhance the synthesis of investigation results and scaffold further research strengthened by other theoretical tools, including an extensive literature review. Thus, to reduce the arbitrariness inherent in the analysis carried out by a researcher, a software-assisted analysis could be utilized to raise the findings' objectivity. Even though corpus analysis cannot substitute systematic literature review, the techniques deployed in this study may usefully complement it: what escapes human attention is evident for the machine. Finally, it could be interesting to apply the research design adopted in this study to explore the discourses on concomitant problems of language teaching and learning.

SUMMARY

The present study explored the dominant discourses of language teaching challenges by utilizing methods associated with corpus linguistics and probed for the validity of the applied methodological design. The gleanings were obtained based on a specialized corpus (638312 tokens) of journal articles pertinent to the designated topic aggregated from the flagship journals in the field. By deploying keyword and collocation analyses, with a further qualitative interpretation of quantitative data, the study evinced the prevalent themes and concepts related to language teaching challenges. As observed, the discussion of challenges revolved around the themes of agents and objects in language education, the instructional process, multifarious research foci, and competence areas. Among the principal concepts explicated in the target corpus were the role of English and language proficiency in the globalized world and the contextual nature of challenges. Extensive coverage also received the concepts of language teacher identity, online education, language learning motivation, language teachers' knowledge base, and language teaching approaches. Contrary to expectations, the discussion of language competence areas was underrepresented in the target corpus considering their seminal role in language acquisition. In all, the applied research procedure has proven a sound methodology capable of signposting the salient themes and concepts tackled in academic publications, given the numerous parallels drawn between the results of the present and previous studies.

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CHAPTER 6
EFL STUDENT TEACHING
UNDER CHALLENGING CIRCUMSTANCES

Initial exposure to teaching has often been described as a kind of reality shock caused by the discrepancies between pre-service teachers' preconceived notions and classroom realities (Bertram, 2023; Zorba, 2022). Many prospective teachers enter their first teaching assignments with idealized expectations developed during their years spent in formal preparation, which may not align with the demands and needs of educational institutions (Farrell, 2016; 2006). Furthermore, the feeling of disorientation is intensified by the added difficulties of language teaching arising from the complexities of the discipline itself and the status of English in the globalized world. As the would-be educators navigate the complexities of language instruction, these factors make this early encounter even more daunting.

While numerous studies have explored the challenges faced by pre-service teachers during their field experience, they may not fully capture the nuances of language education and teacher preparation due to their situated nature. From a sociocultural perspective, language teacher education should recognize "the social, political, economic, and cultural histories located in the contexts where L2 teachers live, learn, and work" (Johnson, 2009, p. 6). Sensitizing teacher preparation to the sociocultural context in which it is set is a significant challenge. Moreover, off-the-shelf solution to educational issues is precluded due to the unique nature of language learning and teaching experiences. Therefore, it is crucial to approach research in this area with a finely tuned, context-sensitive perspective to gain a comprehensive understanding of and address the challenges faced by pre-service teachers in language education.

From the existing research on the challenges of language teaching in Ukraine (e.g., Komar et al., 2021; Levrints, 2022), little is known about the difficulties prospective EFL teachers encounter during the initial stages of their professional development in this country, especially in the context of a full-scale military intervention. However, looking into the perceived hardships of early language teaching experiences could offer valuable insights for teacher education programs to improve their relevance and effectiveness. To this end, this paper aims to examine the challenges EFL pre-service teachers face during their school practicum in Ukraine, with a

focus on the effects of the ongoing war, including teaching in life-threatening conditions and adapting to an online format. In this study, the term "challenges" refers to the difficulties or hindrances arising in the process of learning to teach. By shedding light on these challenges, this study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the unique needs of pre-service teachers in the Ukrainian context, identifying areas where teacher education programs can be improved to better prepare new teachers for the demands of language teaching.

Student teaching as a critical requirement of formal teacher education holds profound implications for a smooth transition into the teaching field and subsequent professional development (Goldhaber et al., 2017; Zeichner, 2002). Effective school practicum lends authenticity to teacher education programs by engaging students in real-world professional activities under the guidance of mentors and university supervisors. However, the initialization of any professional activity, particularly the complex task of teaching, is strewn with difficulties. Moreover, pre-service teachers must navigate [1]additional responsibilities of their university programs, such as meeting course requirements and taking examinations, while simultaneously striving to develop their language teaching competence in the school setting.

Pre-service teachers may be unaware of or oblivious to numerous hidden blocks encompassed by language teaching. As a result, many of them enter the profession with an overestimation of their abilities, feeling ready to handle any task requiring high levels of competence (Norton, 2019). This naïve enthusiasm can get easily bruised against the harsh realities of the classroom, shattering the idealized image students develop before their teaching experience (Farrell, 2016; Kozikoğlu & Senemoğlu, 2021). By all accounts, preparing pre-service teachers for all the contingencies that arise in the course of teaching, even for programs that incorporate cutting-edge research, practices, and extensive training, is highly implausible. The like discrepancies cannot be fully resolved during the initial teacher education because, as Bertran (2023) explains, they are rooted in different domains, including the systems of the classroom, the school, and the macro-educational system (p. 11). However, an effective program should make

this first encounter of prospective teachers with professional realities less shocking by helping them form sounder expectations by reexamining their underlying beliefs.

The student-to-teacher role swap is recognized as a critical period with consequences regarding teacher retention and attrition. Unfortunately, the literature mainly discusses the detrimental effects of a rough transition from learning to the teaching role. Thus, excessive challenges experienced by new teachers lead to a decrease in their motivation to teach (Back & Dean, 2020), increased levels of stress (Bozkurt, 2021; Sulis et al., 2021), a tendency to backslide to more authoritative teaching styles, and a preference of more traditional language teaching approaches (Teng, 2017). The inability to effectively cope with these challenges and poor resilience strategies, especially in the early teaching period, often result in many novices quitting the profession (Beltman et al., 2011; Bozkurt, 2021).

Having considered the risks of inadequate preparation for the teaching realities, we now discuss challenges faced by language teachers, particularly emphasizing the documented challenges experienced by prospective language teachers. Challenges have been conceptualized as hardships inducing teachers' cognitive, emotional, or behavioral responses (Lőrincz, 2022a). If challenges are perceived as doable tasks, they can facilitate teacher performance and professional development (Zorba, 2022). Conversely, if teachers view them as threats to their competence, this may lead to anxiety, stress, or burnout. Language teaching challenges encompass those inherent to the teaching irrespective of the subject matter area and also those specific to the discipline itself. Moreover, perceptions of challenges transfigure over time, i.e., language teachers' understanding of challenges is prone to diminish in intensity as language teachers mature professionally, although not in a linear fashion (Lőrincz & Greba, 2022; Lőrincz, 2022b; Zorba, 2022).

The available research indicates that practicing language teachers face a range of challenges (Akçor & Savaşçı, 2020), with the perceived adequacy of language proficiency and pedagogical content knowledge being two prominent areas of concern. In terms of language proficiency, pre-service teachers were found to struggle with their own language skills (Koşar, 2020), which consequently impacted their ability to effectively communicate with learners and develop their language competencies (Kabilan, 2013; Mirici & Ölmez-Çağlar, 2017; Ong et al., 2004; Yunus et al., 2010; Zorba, 2022). Another source of challenges is documented in the literature on pedagogical

content knowledge. Thus, insufficient knowledge of language teaching methodology and pedagogy made it difficult for pre-service teachers to select appropriate teaching methods and techniques. In a study conducted by Alamri (2018), pre-service teachers self-reported feeling highly challenged when it came to selecting appropriate teaching methods. Similarly, in the study by Yunus et al. (2010), EFL pre-service teachers expressed serious difficulties in applying the methods they had learned in university settings to real-world classroom contexts.

As highlighted in several studies, the inadequacy of pedagogical knowledge gave rise to various challenges, including classroom management, learner assessment, lesson planning, discipline, and curriculum, among others (Akcan, 2016; Alamri, 2018; Kabilan, 2013; Pasaka et al., 2014; Zorba, 2022). By way of illustration, Pasaka et al. (2014) documented challenges encountered in lesson planning and classroom management as the most daunting activities. In the above study, prospective language teachers reported struggling with lesson planning, especially in selecting instructional materials suitable for diverse learners' needs and mixed abilities. Classroom management was also a major challenge, with disruptive learner behavior posing significant difficulties for practicing teachers. The authors noted that low levels of learner motivation and disparate levels of English proficiency of learners further complicated classroom management. School learners' negative attitude towards pre-service teachers and discipline problems coupled with low language learning motivation were documented as major challenges in the study by Yunus et al. (2010). The participants in this study also had difficulties translating theory into practice and applying appropriate teaching methods.

An extensive body of literature has documented the challenges of online language teaching induced by the Covid-19 pandemic (Tao & Gao, 2022). As highlighted in the study by Back et al. (2021), the sudden shift to remote teaching presented significant problems for practicing language teachers. According to the researchers, practicing teachers of world languages and those with prior experience in online instruction felt "an overall feeling of unpreparedness" (p. 8). The absence of in-person interaction further aggravated their feeling of frustration. The lack of adequate preparation for online language teaching had notable consequences. The participants in this study had to make substantial modifications to their curriculum to suit the online learning environment and struggled to prepare engaging

activities. As a result, their expectations for student achievement were significantly lowered. Nevertheless, they reported increasing their flexibility, patience, and empathy in organizing instruction. They also demonstrated enhanced creativity in engaging their students. In the study conducted by Arslan (2021), both beneficial and detrimental effects of online education on EFL teachers' motivation were reported. The research highlighted various intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors associated with online teaching. Interestingly, the challenges of online teaching were perceived by the participants as a source of motivation, encouraging them to persist in the face of financial and mental risks.

Overall, the available research into challenges underscores the importance of preparing pre-service teachers for the realities and expectations of classroom settings. While there is a sizeable body of research on challenges in student teaching, the experience gained by EFL pre-service teachers amidst war makes it unique, thus requiring additional research attention. This paper is thus guided by the following research question: What challenges do EFL pre-service teachers face during their school practicum in Ukraine?

Method

An exploratory research design was employed to seek answers to the research question, as this design is particularly useful for investigating new or understudied phenomena (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Mixed-methods approach was adopted to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the problem being studied − the challenges faced by EFL pre-service teachers in Ukraine. This involved the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, which were obtained through a questionnaire and a narrative survey. Narrative inquiry, as defined by Clarke (2023), is "the study of experience interpreted by and through stories of practice" (p. 238). It entails personal accounts of events from the authors' perspectives, providing insights into constructing individual stories from their experiences. Within the field of teacher education research, narrative inquiry is commonly applied to explore teachers' lived experiences recounted by the teachers themselves. By utilizing this research method, the study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the EFL pre-service teachers' personal perspectives and experiences. Thus, combining these two research tools provides a more comprehensive and well-rounded understanding of the identified issue.

Participants

A total of 140 pre-service teachers expressed their voluntary consent to participate in this study, and out of these, 15 students agreed to commit themselves to narrative writing. The participants were enrolled in English language and literature education programs at the bachelor's level (N=78) and master's level (N=62) across different universities in Ukraine. The undergraduate students typically completed a four-week teaching practicum, while the graduate students had a school practicum lasting from one to two months, depending on their university. The field experience occurred in comprehensive secondary schools or grammar schools in urban and rural areas throughout the country. During this time, the pre-service teachers taught at various educational levels under the guidance of a mentor teacher. All participants were non-native English speakers. The purposeful sampling technique was applied to identify eligible participants for the narrative writing (Creswell, 2012), considering their willingness to contribute voluntarily and their ability to provide detailed insights into the issues examined in this study. Code names (T1 – T15) were assigned to the respondents to maintain confidentiality.

Context

Among the major aspirations of Ukraine is its effort to integrate into the European education system, which requires the country to achieve compatibility with world-class practices. In response, the country has been working to reform its traditional education system inherited from the former USSR. Unfortunately, this progress was significantly hindered by the full-scale military invasion of its territory on February 24th, 2022, causing severe damage to both human and material resources. Despite the devastating impact of the war on the country's socioeconomic well-being, the Ukrainian education sector remains committed to sustaining and enhancing its quality.

Notably, the preparation of language teachers has not ceased, and students continue to participate in school practicum programs either offline or online around the country. However, student teaching, which is already a challenging experience, has become even more difficult due to the compounding effects of the war and the shift to online practicum mode.

Data collection

In our study, we utilized two data sources. The first data source consisted of narratives written by the students upon completing their main practicum phase. To ensure the narratives yielded relevant information, we provided

students with prompts. In the first section, the students were asked to reflect on their general experiences during the practicum, including their biggest challenges, perceived causes of difficulties, their impact on teaching style and interaction with learners, the quality of support received from mentors, etc. The second section aimed to elicit specific information about language teaching challenges. Students were prompted to discuss areas such as the development of language skills, classroom management, their own language proficiency, and strategies to engage learners with instructional material. In the final part of the narrative, titled "Lessons learned," participants were encouraged to reflect on how the practicum experience had influenced them as teachers. Furthermore, participants were requested to evaluate their perceived level of preparedness for their future teaching careers.

The second data source utilized in this study was a researcher-designed questionnaire, primarily aimed at gathering quantitative data that focused on critical aspects of the field experience. By employing this questionnaire, we aimed to collect data from a larger sample size, thus achieving more breadth of the provided information. Additionally, it facilitated a comparison between the study's qualitative and quantitative findings. The content of the questionnaire was selected based on several sources. Firstly, we examined similar problems described in the existing literature. Secondly, the responses the participants provided in their narratives were considered, as they provided insights into their experiences and difficulties encountered during the practicum. Lastly, we sought feedback from practicum supervisors to share their expertise as to the key areas included in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire targeted pre-service teachers' views on the challenges of delivering instruction in English and related difficulties of language proficiency, lesson planning and its implementation, selection of appropriate language teaching approaches, methods, and techniques, establishing rapport with learners, discipline, teaching language aspects and skills, knowledge assessment, challenges of teaching English online, emotional well-being, and initiation into teaching. The participants were also asked to evaluate their level of preparation to assume teaching responsibilities, the value of school practicum experience, and motivation to pursue language teaching as a career.

In the above close-ended items, the respondents were required to express their views on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 representing the strongest disagreement with the statement and 5 – the strongest level of

endorsement (e.g., 1 - not challenging at all to 5 - extremely challenging). The questionnaire's final part requested information about the participants' demographic data, including their major, year of study, educational level, duration of practicum, their learners' age, and language proficiency level.

The study was conducted towards the end of the spring semester of the academic year of 2022/23, indicating that the war has persisted for over a year.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to process the qualitative data obtained from the narratives. Thematic analysis is a robust method for uncovering patterns and themes within the output (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed an inductive approach, which allowed the participants' perspectives to guide the interpretation of their challenges. A four-step procedure recommended by Saldana (2016) was used to process the data. Initially, the narratives were carefully examined, and common issues discussed by the authors were identified and assigned codes. Values coding was employed, which is described as "the application of codes onto qualitative data that reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives" (Saldana, 2016, p. 110). The data were then organized into categories by collating units of information that had similar codes. Through an iterative process of refining the codes and categories, certain codes were merged to form broader categories. For instance, codes like "poor class participation," "laziness," and "refusal to do homework" were combined into the broader category of "motivation." This iterative refinement ensured that the categories accurately represented the data. Finally, the interrelated categories were synthesized into themes. Saldana (2016) explains that a theme is an outcome of coding, categorization, or analytic reflection (p. 14). These themes offer valuable insights into the research question addressed in the study.

To ensure the coding process's dependability and credibility, analytic memo writing, member checking, and saturation were employed (Dörnyei, 2007; Saldana, 2016). A reflective journal with detailed analytic memos was prepared initially (Saldana, 2016, p. 36). These memos allowed the coder to document reflections and insights throughout the coding process, enhancing the traceability of the analysis. Also, the narratives were thoroughly reread and re-analyzed until reaching the point of saturation. Saturation occurs when no new or additional data can be extracted from the narratives,

indicating that the analysis has comprehensively covered the provided information. In addition, member checking was implemented to validate the inferences drawn by the coder. The participants were consulted to confirm the accuracy of the interpretation of their responses. This ensured that the respondents' perspectives were objectively represented in the analysis. The researchers were not involved in organizing or evaluating pre-service teachers' performance during the school practicum, which minimized the effect of researcher bias.

The SPSS software package was utilized to analyze the quantitative data, producing descriptive and inferential statistics that highlighted the general trends in responses about the challenging aspects of EFL student teaching. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test (non-parametric statistical analysis) was conducted, which is employed to assess the difference between two within-subject conditions (Field, 2009). To address the issues of reliability and validity, a panel of experts was invited to evaluate the instrument's quality. Thus, two researchers were involved in language teacher preparation, and two pre-service teachers were requested to comment on the items' relevance and clarity. After careful consideration of their feedback, corresponding changes were introduced. This enhanced the questionnaire's face and content validity while guaranteeing that no questions were misinterpreted during data collection. Given that the questionnaire was administered to non-native pre-service teachers who learned English as a foreign language, particular attention was given to the overall formulation of the items to ensure clarity and understanding. This was done to prevent any confusion or ambiguity in the questions. An internal consistency analysis was conducted using SPSS to assess the reliability of the instrument. Specifically, a correlation coefficient, Cronbach's alpha, was found to be .817. This value indicates an appropriate level of internal consistency among the items in the questionnaire (Field, 2009, p. 675).

Findings

Findings of the Qualitative Analysis

Based on the findings of the narrative inquiry, five intersecting themes emerged in terms of challenges experienced by EFL pre-service teachers during their school practicum in Ukraine (Figure 1). These themes are related to language learners, instruction, teacher identity, facilities, and

socialization in teaching. Of these, dealing with learners attracted the largest number of comments by EFL pre-service teachers in this study. This theme encompassed various aspects such as managing disruptive behavior, establishing rapport with learners, addressing learner motivation, accommodating learners with special educational needs, and handling mixed-ability classes. The second theme, labeled "Instruction," included issues with lesson planning and management, clear teaching, teaching language competencies (e.g., grammar) and skills, and selecting appropriate language teaching methods and techniques. The "Teacher identity" theme reflected issues related to teaching competence, personal qualities, teaching style, and emotional well-being. The participants viewed Issues as "Facilities" as a consequence of the ongoing war in Ukraine. This theme encompassed challenges associated with online education, power shortcuts, unreliable internet connection, and the need to conduct lessons in sheltered areas during shelling alerts. Lastly, the theme of "Initiation into teaching" focused on the processes of assuming the role of an EFL teacher and integrating into the professional community.

Figure 6.1. The results of qualitative analysis of EFL student teaching challenges

6.1.1. Learners

The qualitative data analysis revealed that the theme of "Learners" had the strongest impact on pre-service teachers' perceptions of challenges, as evidenced by the frequency counts and the level of detail in the comments (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1. Details in the "Learners" theme of EFL student teaching challenges

№	Categories	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
1	Disruptive learner behavior and discipline	10	67
2	Learner motivation	8	53
3	Rapport	6	40
4	Learners with special educational needs	6	40
5	Mixed-ability learners	5	33

Specifically, pre-service teachers reported facing significant challenges related to disruptive behavior and discipline issues among learners, with many considering it the biggest challenge encountered during their practicum (10 respondents). Additionally, eight participants struggled with learners' reluctance to do homework or complete class assignments, described in the narratives as "*laziness*," "*a lack of understanding of the importance of English*" among pupils, or having "*passive learners.*" The following excerpts illustrate these challenges:

T3: Overly active learners disrupted lessons. Some of them kept interrupting others and didn't allow shier students to speak.

However, as explained by T11, learners' misbehavior is not necessarily a reflection of them being inherently "bad" but rather a way for them to seek attention. This student-teacher believed that most of the discipline problems could be resolved by providing the necessary support and care. T11 stated:

T11: Sometimes, to gain attention, students do a lot of bad things because they need support and care, not because they are inherently bad.

Furthermore, six students reported significant challenges in teaching learners with special educational needs, primarily due to their lack of competence and experience in this area. T2 noted:

T2: I had to teach a dyslexic girl in the 5th grade. At times, she would get unruly, disrupting my lessons and disturbing other children who were trying to learn and focus on the material.

T15 reported even more severe difficulties in dealing with learners with special needs, e.g., such as instances of cursing during lessons and throwing objects at others.

Six pre-service teachers also reported experiencing difficulties with establishing rapport with learners, as mentioned in the excerpts below:

T13: At first, it was difficult to find common ground with the pupils, as each of them had their own unique characteristics.

T7: There were some students who wanted to test me and my knowledge. They would ask tricky or even personal questions. It took time and effort to gain acceptance from the learners.

T15: At first, the children misbehaved, so I attempted to prepare interesting activities and games and select topics relevant to their lives. It was difficult at the beginning, but little by little, we began to understand each other. The students became calmer and started participating more actively in the lessons.

Furthermore, learners emerged as a powerful motivating factor, as recounted by the participants (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2. Learners as a source of motivation

№	Categories	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
1	Positive attitude of learners	8	53
2	Positive feedback from learners	5	33
3	Motivated learners	5	33
4	Respect from learners	3	20

The following comments exemplify this perspective:

T13: Working with children was fascinating. Receiving positive feedback from the learners was one of the most rewarding aspects of my school practicum.

T5: One of the highlights of the practicum was the students' respect and positive attitude. They seemed to be genuinely interested in my lessons!

Overall, while learners played a role in pre-service teachers' perceptions of challenges, they were often portrayed positively.

6.1.2. Instruction

Various challenges related to EFL instruction surfaced as the second most frequently discussed theme, as depicted in Table 6.3.

**Table 6.3. Details in the "Instruction" theme
of EFL student teaching challenges**

№	Categories	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
1	Lesson planning and management	8	53
2	Clear teaching (effective explanation of new material)	7	47
3	Subcategories in teaching language competencies:		
	• Grammar	5	33
	• Vocabulary	1	7

Table 6.3 (continued)

№	Categories	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
4	Subcategories in teaching language skills:		
	• Speaking	8	53
	• Listening	3	20
	• Writing	3	20
	• Reading	2	13.3
5	Selecting appropriate instructional materials and methods	7	47
6	Personalizing instruction	4	27

Table 6.3 showcases that the theme of instruction encompassed lesson planning and management, which pre-service teachers closely associated with selecting appropriate materials and approaches. A notable finding was that the respondents made efforts to provide learners with engaging materials and tasks, particularly through the use of games and technological aids, in order to address low learner motivation and disruptive behavior. Several pre-service teachers noted that adapting their instruction to learners' needs and interests and eliminating boredom helped them tackle student misbehavior and promote class participation. They also believed that this contributed to establishing rapport with learners. The following excerpts illustrate this:

T9: At first, it was difficult to select tasks and organize them in a way that students could understand and perform them effectively. Planning the lesson and ensuring a smooth transition between activities was not always easy. It was also challenging to find and design tasks that would be interesting, enjoyable, and, most importantly, useful to students. There were overly active students in the classes who were used to being the center of attention, and I struggled to find the right approach and communication style for them.

T7: At the beginning of the practicum, I had problems with student discipline, so I decided to try out various interesting tasks. I made an effort to learn about the backgrounds and needs of my students and observed them closely. This helped me to gain better control over the classroom and manage the children.

T5: I realized that I enjoyed experimenting with different teaching methods. This helped me to understand how they can be combined to facilitate learning for the students.

An issue attracting considerable attention was the clear explanation of new material, particularly grammar.

T5: I encountered difficulties in selecting the most suitable way to present new topics, as each age group requires a different approach.

T11: Explaining material proved difficult because of the terminology I had to use when I talked about grammar. I had to translate everything to ensure better understanding, which added to the challenge.

Teaching speaking was identified as one of the most challenging skills to develop by the respondents (n=8). Pre-service teachers often mentioned that learners were shy and nervous about speaking English. Additionally, three students highlighted the difficulties of teaching writing.

T7: Developing writing skills posed serious challenges for me. It was hard to encourage learners to write stories or essays. They told me they hated it!

Poor language command among learners posed difficulties in teaching listening, as described by a pre-service teacher:

T12: There were pupils who didn't understand the basics, which made it challenging for me to select appropriate listening tasks that matched their level. The materials provided in the coursebooks were often too complicated for them.

Two comments highlighted the challenges of teaching reading due to learners' reluctance to read in English.

Personalizing instruction was a recurring topic in the narratives. Teaching learners with varying proficiency levels, different needs and interests, diverse nationalities, and varying levels of motivation was a cause of concern for pre-service teachers.

T11: Trying to find "a key" to each child in the classroom is not an easy task. It takes a lot of time and patience.

6.1.3. Teacher identity

Table 6.4 presents pre-service teachers' views on challenges arising from their individual characteristics.

**Table 6.4. Details in the "Teacher Identity" theme
of EFL student teaching challenges**

№	Categories	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
1	Competence and self-development	8	53
2	Subcategories in personal qualities:		
	• Self-confidence	7	47
	• Patience	5	33

Table 6.4 (continued)

№	Categories	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
3	Authoritative teaching style (strictness)	3	20
4	Emotional well-being (fear, stress, insecurity)	8	53

The participants consistently emphasized the significance of competence development and self-improvement as crucial factors (n=8). These factors were closely related to pre-service teachers' perceived self-confidence, which was influenced by their self-assessment of competence. Students acknowledged that they lacked confidence stemming from their current level of competence.

T10: I think the lack of competence was the main source of the challenge. I encountered numerous unexpected situations where I didn't know what to do, e.g., dealing with a learner with special educational needs.

T2: Teaching is really difficult and not as easy as I had initially believed. School practicum taught me the importance of thorough preparation, continuous knowledge enhancement, and readiness to handle situations that may occur during lessons.

Five participants realized that they were patient in their interactions with learners.

T4: I discovered that I can be remarkably patient with children, and I feel highly motivated when I see my pupils learning something new and useful with my help.

The emphasis placed on the importance of being stricter with learners indicates that pre-service teachers may lean towards adopting a more authoritative teaching style in their future professional pursuits.

T1: I should have been stricter with the pupils because some of them didn't take me seriously.

A common issue discussed by the participants was the emotional reactions triggered by teaching. More than half of the respondents (n=8) reported feeling fear or stress and a sense of insecurity when performing various teaching tasks, highlighting the need for greater resilience. According to their accounts, they were afraid when pupils asked for translations of unfamiliar words (e.g., T4, T7) or posed difficult grammar questions (T5). T10 felt stressed due to the negative atmosphere in the classroom. T7 also mentioned feeling afraid to engage with the learners and "look them in the eyes." T3 and T7 expressed stress related to their language proficiency. However, this was more of an exception, as the majority reported no difficulties in speaking English. The following excerpts illustrate this:

T4: Some pupils would bring up "interesting" words from songs or films that were difficult to translate. Sometimes it took really long, or they made no sense. So it was quite scary.

T8: I realized that I need to be more self-confident and resilient to stress so that pupils would perceive me as a "real" teacher.

6.1.4. Facilities

The analysis of the data revealed that various factors, such as teaching in shelters amidst air alarms (n=3, 20%), online teaching (n=5, 33%), electricity shortages, and poor internet connection (n=6, 40%), negatively impacted all participants in the instructional process. As reported by pre-service teachers, the context of war had a deleterious effect on motivation and attitudes toward language learning. Even experienced educators expressed serious concerns, as mentioned by the participants. The learners displayed a decrease in motivation, increased truancy, discipline problems, and a loss of self-discipline. Pre-service teachers faced challenges in maintaining learners' attention and interest during online teaching. Many misbehaved and cheated, e.g., as intentionally turning off the camera or playing music. Two respondents specifically mentioned difficulties in disciplining young learners during online teaching, while no such issues were encountered with adolescents. The following responses illustrate the challenges associated with this theme:

T1: The biggest challenge I faced was teaching in the shelter, where there were multiple classes held simultaneously.

T4: Unfortunately, learners tried to do their best, but due to frequent power cuts and air alarms, it was extremely hard for them. In addition, many of them were unable to attend lessons regularly, making it difficult to introduce and teach new material consistently.

T15: Online teaching was different from in-person classes, as students were not serious about studying most of the time. The level of their effectiveness and attention span significantly decreased. They viewed online studying as an unplanned vacation. As a result, some of them rarely joined online classes or were inattentive most of the time.

The participants also mentioned difficulties in choosing engaging activities suitable for an online format.

T8: One of the major challenges was being able to connect to the online class because my street never had electricity. Another challenge was creating interesting games and quizzes for the students.

6.1.5. Initiation into teaching

Integration into the educational community was identified as a particular area of concern for the respondents, particularly when taking on the role of an EFL teacher (n=4, 27%) and seeking acceptance from colleagues (n=3, 20%). Data from the narratives revealed that being accepted by the teaching staff, adapting to the school environment and expectations, and transitioning from the role of a learner to that of a teacher were among the biggest challenges encountered by pre-service teachers. The following excerpts exemplify these challenges:

T3: During my practicum in school, some of the biggest challenges I faced were adapting to the school's culture and routines, establishing connections with colleagues and students, and managing classroom behavior. It took me some time to understand the school's expectations and procedures, as well as to build rapport with the students. However, with the support of my cooperating teacher and other mentors, I was able to overcome these challenges and evolve as a teacher.

T6: Personally, my biggest challenge was fitting in and getting accepted by the teachers.

T 10: It was a great opportunity to fully immerse myself in the school atmosphere and "try on" the role of an English teacher, to see everything from within, so to speak.

T11: Although teaching was a bit hard, especially at the beginning, but it was a worthwhile experience to taste the life of a teacher.

Overall, the data analysis indicates that despite the numerous challenges encountered by pre-service teachers, the school practicum had a positive impact on their attitude and motivation toward teaching. As summarized by T12: "*These challenges in the final run turned into benefits.*" There was only one report by T6, who realized after completing the practicum that teaching was not the career path they wanted to pursue.

T6: The practicum didn't provide me with enough preparation to give me the confidence and motivation to engage myself in teaching.

Similarly, T2 remarked that some of the challenging aspects of language teaching led her to doubt her competence and reconsider her intention to become a language teacher.

T2: There was an incident during my practice that made me question my teaching skills and whether I truly wanted to become a teacher.

Interestingly, many pre-service teachers emphasized creativity in language teaching as a way to resolve various issues and overcome challenges. Based on their responses, they reported experimenting or planning to experiment with language teaching approaches that cater to students' interests and needs to stimulate language learning motivation and mitigate disruptive behavior.

Results of the Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis results, displayed in Table 6.5, illustrate the pre-service teachers' perceptions of the challenges they experienced during their school practicum.

Table 6.5. EFL Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions of Challenges

Aspects of EFL student teaching	Mean	Std. Dev.
1. How well were you prepared for your school practicum experience?	4.01	.749
2. How confident were you in speaking English to learners during your school practicum?	3.90	.742
3. How challenging was it for you to develop and deliver lesson plans during your school practicum?	2.59	1.04
4. How challenging was it for you to select appropriate language teaching methods and techniques?	2.51	1.01
5. How challenging was it for you to establish rapport with your learners?	1.89	.968
6. How challenging was it for you to manage student behavior?	2.43	.891
7. How challenging was it for you to develop your learners' speaking skills?	2.66	.958
8. How challenging was it for you to develop your learners' listening skills?	2.59	1.05
9. How challenging was it for you to develop your learners' reading skills?	2.30	1.13
10. How challenging was it for you to develop your learners' writing skills?	2.54	1.08
11. How challenging was it for you to teach grammar?	2.50	1.01
12. How challenging was it for you to teach vocabulary?	1.93	.903
13. How challenging was it for you to assess students' knowledge?	2.33	.999
14. If you had teaching experience, how difficult was it for you to manage the shift to online teaching and learning?	2.28	1.01
15. How well did you maintain your own emotional well-being during practicum?	4.00	1.05

Table 6.5 (continued)

Aspects of EFL student teaching	Mean	Std. Dev.
16. How challenging was it for you to get accepted by school teachers?	2.15	.937
17. How challenging was it for you to assume the role of a teacher?	2.65	.740
18. How much did you learn from your school practicum experience?	4.34	.811
19. How likely are you to pursue a career in teaching a foreign language after your school practicum experience?	3.13	1.27
20. How valuable do you believe your school practicum experience was in preparing you for a career in teaching a foreign language?	4.03	.913

Based on the data, the respondents expressed confidence in their level of competence. They felt adequately prepared for the responsibilities of language teaching (M=4.01) and confident in their ability to speak English to learners (M=3.90), indicating a perceived level of language proficiency. The challenges they reported were moderate in relation to lesson plan preparation and delivery (M=2.59) and the selection of appropriate methodology (M=2.51). Discipline issues (M=2.43) and establishing rapport with learners (M=1.89) were not considered major challenges. Surprisingly, the shift to online teaching posed only a moderate degree of challenge (M=2.28). The pre-service teachers' emotional well-being was not under serious pressure either (M=4.00). Overall, the participants did not perceive any aspect of language teaching as very or extremely challenging.

The results of the respondents' perceptions of the challenges of teaching language competencies and skills indicated a moderate level of challenge. Teaching speaking emerged as the most challenging aspect, followed by teaching listening, writing, grammar, and reading. Conversely, the pre-service teachers perceived teaching vocabulary as a less challenging area. These findings are consistent with the qualitative data obtained earlier in this study.

Next, the qualitative data analysis suggested that the pre-service teachers were significantly influenced by their interactions with learners, particularly in terms of discipline issues. The second most frequently discussed theme was related to instruction. It was of interest to examine whether the level of challenge associated with the "Learners" theme was higher than that of the "Instruction" theme. For this, the variables pertaining to lesson

planning and management, as well as selecting appropriate methodology, were merged to form the "Instruction" theme. Similarly, the variables encompassing learner rapport and student misbehavior were likewise merged to represent the "Learner" theme. A Wilcoxon test was conducted to compare the responses regarding these two themes (Table 6.6).

Table 6.6. Results of Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Test Statistics a	
"learners" – "instruction"	Negative Ranks	28[a]	43.14	1208.00	Z	-4.586[b]
	Positive Ranks	72[b]	53.36	3842.00	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	Ties	40[c]			a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	
	Total	140			b. Based on negative ranks	
a. learners < instruction						
b. learners > instruction						
c. learners = instruction						

The test results showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the respondents' perceptions of challenges related to learners and instruction (z= -4.586, p>.001). Based on this finding, it can be inferred that the respondents consider organizing instruction (Mdn=5.00) more challenging than dealing with learners (Mdn=4.00).

The evaluation results of the school practicum experience revealed that the participants highly valued the experience gained from the practicum. A significant proportion of the respondents, 76 individuals (54.3%), reported learning a great deal from the practicum, while 38 participants (27.1%) explained that they learned quite a bit. Only two students (1.4%) mentioned that they learned very little. Furthermore, the majority of participants, 48 (34.3%), considered student teaching extremely valuable, and 60 participants (42.9%) regarded it as very valuable in preparing them for a teaching career. However, despite the positive experiences and perceived value of the practicum, the respondents expressed hesitancy in pursuing teaching as a career. Thus, only 22 respondents (15.7%) expressed a strong determination to choose teaching as their career path, while an additional

34 individuals (24.3%) indicated a high likelihood of pursuing a teaching career. However, 46 participants (32.9%) had doubts regarding their professional choice, and 22 individuals (15.7%) were firmly opposed to pursuing the teaching profession.

Discussion

This study explored the perceptions of challenges EFL pre-service teachers face during their school practicum experience in Ukraine. To this end, qualitative and quantitative data were collected to elucidate the challenging aspects of student teaching. In-depth qualitative information about language teaching challenges was garnered through narratives from 15 EFL pre-service teachers. Additionally, quantitative data were gathered through a researcher-designed questionnaire, which was completed by 140 pre-service teachers, allowing for a broader examination of the challenges encountered during the practicum.

Initiation into professional activity has been described in the literature as the most challenging stage in a teaching career. During the school practicum, pre-service teachers are confronted with multiple expectations from their educational program, learners, and school administration. In Ukraine, these difficulties are compounded by the ongoing military intervention, which necessitates the organization of instruction both offline and online amidst life-threatening conditions. For pre-service teachers who are still in the process of learning to teach amidst such war-induced circumstances, this presents a significant hurdle. Therefore, the study of challenges in this setting was deemed highly relevant.

The qualitative analysis revealed five interwoven themes that encompass the challenges experienced by pre-service teachers, including "learners," "instruction," "teacher identity," "facilities," and "initiation into teaching." These themes link to challenges related to interacting with learners, teaching EFL, adapting to online education and the classroom environment, individual characteristics, and transitioning into the teaching profession. While the participants acknowledged the significant challenges associated with working with learners, they also described it as a rewarding experience.

Addressing discipline issues, disruptive behavior, and learners' reluctance to engage with the instructional material were among the most

frequently discussed aspects of the practicum. These findings were anticipated, as discipline problems and low learner motivation are common challenges even for experienced teachers (Akcan, 2016; Yunus et al., 2010). However, in line with earlier research, motivated learners who displayed a positive attitude and respect toward the pre-service teachers acted as a significant source of motivation for them (Arslan, 2021).

In relation to instruction, the participants reported difficulties with various aspects, including lesson planning and management, clear teaching, and the selection of appropriate language teaching methodologies. Interestingly, the quantitative follow-up did not fully corroborate the qualitative findings suggesting that learners and organizing EFL instruction were perceived as challenging. The pre-service teachers self-reported only moderate challenges with discipline issues and learner rapport. Similarly, organizing instruction was also perceived as only moderately challenging. Furthermore, the results of a Wilcoxon test indicated that organizing instruction posed a higher challenge than dealing with learners. This suggests that the participants perceived instruction as more demanding than managing learner-related issues.

Speaking was found to be the most challenging area of the language-specific aspects of EFL teaching, thus reprising previous research (Copland et al., 2014; Faez & Karas, 2019). This observation was consistent throughout the qualitative phase of the study and was further supported by the quantitative data. The participants consistently rated teaching speaking as the most challenging area, while vocabulary teaching was viewed as the least challenging. This suggests that the participants consider teaching speaking as the most demanding aspect and vocabulary instruction as comparatively less challenging in the context of EFL instruction.

As suggested by the results of qualitative analysis, the respondents were seriously challenged by having to teach amidst war, which involved the transition to online education or teaching in a shelter. In their narratives, the pre-service teachers recounted its negative effect on all participants of the instructional process, particularly the learners' attitudes. However, the quantitative data failed to confirm this finding, as online teaching only moderately challenged the respondents. This finding contradicts the general observations made in the literature regarding the perceived level of challenge associated with online language teaching (Back et al., 2021).

A significant discrepancy between the study's quantitative and qualitative phases was documented in relation to the theme of "identity," which

encompasses the pre-service teachers' individual characteristics. While the qualitative data indicate that the participants view their level of competence as evolving and far from their aspirational selves, underscoring the significance of self-development, the quantitative data contradict this. Interestingly, the students expressed high levels of confidence in their ability to fulfill teaching responsibilities in the questionnaire. They also felt very confident in their EFL proficiency, which runs counter to previous research in this field (Bozkurt, 2021; Kabilan et al., 2020).

Analogously, the findings revealed mixed results when examining the pre-service teachers' emotional well-being in both the quantitative and qualitative phases of this inquiry. In the narratives, fear and stress experienced during practicum surfaced as a matter of concern. However, a similar question asked in the questionnaire produced a relatively low indicator of stress. This also runs counter to observations made in the literature, where beginning teachers were often found to be emotionally vulnerable during their early career stages (Beltman et al., 2011). Furthermore, while several pre-service teachers expressed concerns about the transition into the teaching role and being accepted by other professional community members in the qualitative data, the quantitative data demonstrated a moderate level of challenge in this aspect.

Taken together, while the pertinent literature is replete with the discussion of the challenging nature of early teaching experience, the participants in this study tend to downplay it by overestimating their current level of competence, as indicated by the quantitative data. This finding was partly anticipated, as novice teachers were shown to overestimate their actual level of competence in previous publications (Norton, 2019).

Moreover, this finding finds repercussions in the study of Lőrincz and Greba (2022), according to whom novice language teachers with 1-5 years of teaching experience perceived the level of challenge to be lower compared to their more experienced counterparts (e.g., 10-15 years). This suggests that pre-service teachers may not yet fully grasp the intricacies involved in language teaching and require a longer period of time to develop the nuanced insider knowledge that expert teachers possess. According to Tsui (2009), expert teachers demonstrate sensitivity and possess extensive knowledge across various aspects of language teaching, enabling them to discern potentially challenging areas. Therefore, it can be inferred that pre-service teachers are yet to deepen their professional knowledge and gain more experience to form an adequate assessment of their actual competence in teaching.

Overall, the summative findings of this study's quantitative and qualitative parts underscore the high-value pre-service teachers place on their school practicum experience. They acknowledge the challenges encountered during the practicum, yet they demonstrate resilience and stamina by not feeling overwhelmed by these difficulties. Moreover, a majority of the participants reported benefiting from these challenges, treating them as opportunities for growth and learning.

Conclusions

This study focused on the challenges encountered by EFL pre-service teachers during their school practicum experience in Ukraine by combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. The study's qualitative findings reveal that pre-service teachers' perceptions of challenges are encapsulated within five intersecting themes, such as "learners," "instruction," "teacher identity," "facilities," and "initiation into teaching," which were described as particularly concerning.

However, the quantitative follow-up of these outcomes revealed that the challenges identified by the participants were mainly perceived as moderate. Despite the detailed discussions in the narratives of the issues related to learner discipline, rapport, or organizing instruction, the questionnaire responses indicated that these challenges were rated as slightly to moderately challenging. A similar pattern was observed in the "facilities" theme about online student teaching or teaching in life-threatening circumstances. Although these challenges were described as very challenging in the narratives, they were rated moderate in the questionnaire. Interestingly, while the participants expressed concerns about their current level of competence in the narratives, they reported a high level of confidence in the questionnaire.

In summary, this study underscores the significance of practical preparation in shaping EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions of challenges. It is crucial for teacher education programs to furnish prospective teachers with ample opportunities to engage in classroom settings, leading them to more objective self-appraisal and an understanding of the challenges they may face. It is worth noting that most participants appreciated their initial teaching experience and felt adequately prepared for the teaching responsibilities. However, despite this positive experience, the pre-service teachers still remain hesitant about their decision to pursue a teaching career.

This calls for caution and further exploration, as the reasons behind their low teaching motivation seem to extend beyond the scope of teacher education programs in this country.

The study is not exempt from limitations stemming from the sample's size and its confinement to a specific sociocultural context. However, using both qualitative and quantitative research methods in a triangulation process lends credibility to the findings of this investigation. To further advance this research, future studies could explore and compare the challenges experienced by different groups of pre-service teachers with varying lengths and quality of practical preparation.

SUMMARY

Initiation into teaching is widely acknowledged as a challenging experience. However, these challenges become even more pronounced when compounded by teaching in life-threatening conditions. In light of this, the present study aimed to explore the challenges EFL pre-service teachers face during their school practicum in Ukraine. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed in a complementary manner to offer a comprehensive portrayal of the challenges. The qualitative analysis yielded five intersecting themes encapsulating the challenges of student teaching: "learners," "instruction," "teacher identity," "facilities," and "initiation into teaching." Subsequently, the quantitative analysis of the qualitative findings indicated a moderate level of challenge across the identified themes. Unexpectedly, while the qualitative phase highlighted the serious challenges posed by teaching amidst war and the transition to online education, the quantitative data only partly supported these findings. Additionally, while the participants expressed significant challenges regarding their competence in the qualitative phase, the quantitative measurements indicated a high level of confidence in their perceived preparedness to fulfill teaching responsibilities. Finally, the divergence between pre-service teachers' high appreciation of their practicum experience and their hesitation to pursue a teaching career calls for further investigation to understand the underlying factors contributing to low teaching motivation.

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Монографію присвячено вивченню кола викликів або труднощів, з якими стикаються вчителі іноземних мов у професійній діяльності. У роботі представлені результати дослідження, виконаного із застосуванням низки емпіричних методів. Монографія складається із шести розділів, кожний із яких містить результати досліджень базованих на кількісних та якісних методах збору й обробки даних.